



Mapping Prostitution: Sex, Space, Taxonomy in the Fin-de-Siècle French Novel

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**Mapping Prostitution:
Sex, Space, Taxonomy in the Fin-de-siècle French Novel**

A dissertation presented

by

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to

The Department of Romance Languages and Literatures

in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
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Mapping Prostitution: Sex, Space, Taxonomy in the Fin-de-siècle French Novel

Abstract

This dissertation examines representations of prostitution in male-authored French novels from the later nineteenth century. It proposes that prostitution has a map, and that realist and naturalist authors appropriate this cartography in the Second Empire and early Third Republic to make sense of a shifting and overhauled Paris perceived to resist mimetic literary inscription. Though always significant in realist and naturalist narrative, space is uniquely complicit in the novel of prostitution due to the contemporary policy of reglementarism, whose primary instrument was the *mise en carte*: an official registration that subjected prostitutes to moral and hygienic surveillance, but also “put them on the map,” classifying them according to their space of practice (such as the brothel or the boulevard). It is this spatial and conceptual taxonomy, I contend, that makes the prostitute a fulcrum for authorial mapping – for the assertion of mastery over both the prostitute and the city.

The first chapter reads the inscription of the tolerated brothel in novels by Huysmans and Goncourt as the mark of a nostalgic longing for old Paris and a desire for stability in a resistant urban present. Analyzing the representation of the *brasserie à femmes* in lesser-known works by Tabarant and Barrès, Chapter Two posits that the brasserie prostitute fuels the desires of a generation of aspirational Rastignacs by selling stories alongside beer and sex, adopting a writerly role and troubling authorial mastery of the prostitute and the city. The mobilization of prostitutional metaphors in the *Rougon-Macquart* is the subject of the third chapter, which argues that Zola deploys the prostitute’s entropic force to dismantle the Paris of his predecessors, Balzac and Haussmann,

and clear the ground for the construction of a proper city. The final chapter demonstrates that fin-de-siècle novelist Charles-Louis Philippe makes use of the clandestinity of street prostitution in order to locate a breed of urban mapping that is not contingent on mastery. By remapping the prostitute, the dissertation proposes a new model for understanding both the nineteenth-century novel of prostitution and the lived and represented experience of a Paris that Zola termed “le mauvais lieu de l’Europe.”

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Introduction

L'Empire allait faire de Paris le mauvais lieu de l'Europe.
- Émile Zola, *La Curée* (1872)¹

In the opening pages of Honoré de Balzac's *Ferragus* (1833), the first volume of the *Histoire des Treize*, the narrator delineates two modes of perceiving and negotiating Paris. For the majority of its citizens, the narrator affirms, the capital is a “monstrueuse merveille, étonnant assemblage de mouvements, de machines et de pensées, la ville aux cent mille romans, la tête du monde.”² From this perspective, the city resists assimilation, revealing itself to observers as a bewildering accumulation of stimuli, intelligible as a whole only by virtue of its centrality and cultural capital. For those “amants de Paris” who “dégustent” and “possèdent [...] la physionomie” of the city, however, “Paris est une créature; chaque homme, chaque fraction de maison est un lobe de tissu cellulaire de cette grande courtisane de laquelle ils connaissent parfaitement la tête, le cœur et les mœurs fantasques.”³ Metaphorizing Paris as a heterogeneous courtesan, her every fiber discernible and available to select observers, Balzac endows the urban initiated with a synoptic gaze capable of circumscribing the city and incorporating it as an appropriable other.⁴ This latter mode of perception of Paris resonates with Balzac's most iconic assertion of urban mastery, Eugène de Rastignac's confrontation of the city from the heights of the Père-Lachaise at the end of *Le Père Goriot* (1835):

¹ Émile Zola, *La Curée*, ed. Claude Duchet (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1970), 85.

² Honoré de Balzac, *Ferragus / La Fille aux yeux d'or* (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1988), 79.

³ Most critical readings of this passage efface the difference Balzac establishes with respect to Paris's two groups of observers, “les amants de Paris” and “les autres.” I reaffirm them here in order to establish the baseline stakes for the writing of Paris (and especially Paris as prostitute) in nineteenth-century France.

⁴ I borrow the term “synoptic gaze” from Christian Jacob, *The Sovereign Map: Theoretical Approaches in Cartography Throughout History*, ed. Edward H Dahl, trans. Tom Conley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006). Geographer David Harvey similarly makes reference to Balzac's “synoptic vision” in an insightful analysis of the novelist's desire to possess Paris in *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005), 50–51. Christopher Prendergast offers a compelling account of the figuration of Paris as courtesan in *Ferragus in Paris and the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1995), 136–137. Prendergast also observes that this “metaphorical association of city and prostitute has a lineage stretching back to the literature of antiquity” (136).

Rastignac, resté seul, fit quelques pas vers le haut du cimetière et vit Paris tortueusement couché le long des deux rives de la Seine [...]. Ses yeux s'attachèrent presque avidement entre la colonne de la place Vendôme et le dôme des Invalides, là où vivait ce beau monde dans lequel il avait voulu pénétrer. Il lança sur cette ruche bourdonnante un regard qui semblait par avance en pomper le miel, et dit ces mots grandioses: « A nous deux maintenant ! »⁵

The lobes of the courtesan's cellular tissue are here transmuted into the beehive's hexagonal cells, as Rastignac's voracious ("avid[e]") gaze aligns him with those who "dégustent" the city as a delectable harlot – though the woman here conflated with Paris is not a courtesan but a "grande dame," Delphine de Nucingen.⁶ In both texts, Balzac makes manifest a desire to possess the capital, concomitantly intimating that for proficient observers, the capital is as possessable (if only provisionally) as the courtesan who stands in for it – and that all "grandes dames" are as prostitutes.

As the embodied nexus of the principal motors of Parisian society, money and pleasure – Balzac's "l'or et le plaisir," Zola's "l'or et la chair" – the prostitute is a suitable and seductive stand-in for modern Paris.⁷ For those aspirational urban masters of the early Third Republic who looked to possess the capital city and inscribe it as literary capital, however, Paris was no longer readily figured as a courtesan, conquerable by those brazen upstarts with sufficient semantic skill and virile prowess.⁸ In a sense, then, Rastignac's triumphant confrontation of Paris was interpolated throughout the century as Balzac's implicit challenge to the writers that came after him, as two coeval processes in the latter half of the century destabilized both terms of the metaphorical

⁵ Honoré de Balzac, *Le Père Goriot*, ed. Philippe Berthier (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1996), 312–313.

⁶ On the figuration of Balzac's city as a woman, see Pierre Citron's classic study *La poésie de Paris dans la littérature française de Rousseau à Baudelaire*, 2 vols. (Paris: Minuit, 1961).

⁷ Balzac, *Ferragus* / *La Fille aux yeux d'or*, 211. Zola refers in his preparatory notes to *La Curée* to "la note de l'or et de la chair."

⁸ As Prendergast has shown, Balzac nonetheless problematizes this reading, revealing an "attempt to negotiate a deep anxiety with regard to the mapping, the 'legibility,' of the social landscape of the modern city." *The Order of Mimesis: Balzac, Stendhal, Nerval, Flaubert* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 93–95. I return to this notion in Chapter Two.

equation of Paris and prostitute: Haussmann's sweeping destruction and reconstruction of the city during the Second Empire, and a concomitant shift in the landscape of Parisian prostitution.⁹ Gustave Flaubert's characterization of Paris as "[l]a grande prostituée" in the *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, albeit ironic – and for this very reason a little more astute – further bespeaks a fin-de-siècle refiguration of Balzac's capital in a minor key, as the "grand courtesan" of the July Monarchy becomes by the 1870s an immense (but common) whore figurative not as a whole, but rather as an assemblage.¹⁰ My dissertation traces this shift and explores the coincident mapping of Paris and prostitution in novels from the early decades of the Third Republic, arguing that authors of realist and naturalist texts persistently turn to the prostitute to make sense of a space and time perceived to resist mimetic inscription and – taking up the Balzacian challenge – affirm their urban and literary mastery.

Mapping Paris

Over the course of the Second Empire (1852-1870), and especially during the Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann's tenure as Napoléon III's Prefect of the Department of the Seine (1853-1870), the built landscape of Paris was demolished and reconstructed in an effort to "aérer, unifier et embellir" the capital, making the city orderly, legible, and thus controllable. If contemporary reactions are to be taken at face value, however, this upheaval had quite the opposite effect on practitioners and observers of the city, leaving them disoriented and largely unable to decipher an urban text that continually changed before they had acclimated themselves or acquired

⁹ This shift is brilliantly surveyed in Alain Corbin, *Les Filles de noce: Misère sexuelle et prostitution au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 2010). Corbin locates the shift as indicative of a progressive bourgeoisification of desire over the course of the century.

¹⁰ Gustave Flaubert, *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* (Paris: Poche, 1964), 130. Composed over the course of the 1870s, the *Dictionnaire* was published posthumously in 1913.

the tools to comprehend it.¹¹ In “Voyage à travers les nouvelles ruines,” an introduction appended to the 1855 second edition of his *Paris démoli, mosaïque de ruines*, historian Édouard Fournier cautions his readers that his mnemonic catalogue of Paris’s “new ruins” is incomplete, documenting the streets and monuments lost to the capital’s seemingly endless overhaul only in “quelques parties,” “quelques détails.”¹² Though writing early in Haussmann’s term as prefect, when the Baron was just beginning to trace onto the streets of Paris the color-coded *perevements* plotted on Napoléon III’s visionary (if apocryphal) map, Fournier cannily recognizes that the urban improvements undertaken earlier in the century are yielding to reform on a more ambitious scale.¹³ A comprehensive, cohesive account of Paris’s renovation, he advises, will have to wait until the planner’s work is done: “Nous attendrions toutefois que la démolition, s’arrêtant enfin, nous eût bien défini notre tâche. La plume ne doit commencer son travail que lorsque le marteau aura terminé le sien.”¹⁴ For the urban chronicler, Fournier intimates, renovation and writing are discrete, sequential processes: only when the city has regained a stable, legible form can the pen record the changes wrought by the hammer’s strike.

With the acceleration and expansion of urban modernization over the course of the Second Empire comes an increasingly acute sense that the disjunctive landscape carved out and relentlessly

¹¹ It is interesting that a poet, Charles Baudelaire, writes the most celebrated formulation of this sentiment decades before the appearance of the novels in question, in his poem “Le Cygne”: “Le vieux Paris n’est plus (la forme d’une ville / Change plus vite, hélas ! que le cœur d’un mortel).” *Les Fleurs du Mal* (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1991).

¹² Édouard Fournier, *Paris démoli: Mosaïque de ruines*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Auguste Aubry, 1855), lix. The first edition, published in 1853, the year Haussmann became prefect, drew a positive review from Théophile Gautier, which would be added as a preface to the second edition of *Paris démoli*. Anthony Vidler provides a compelling analysis of Paris past and present in Fournier in his essay “*Paris démoli/Paris Futur*,” in *The Scenes of the Street and Other Essays* (New York: Monacelli, 2011).

¹³ Patrick Bray discusses this celebrated map, whose existence is affirmed only by Haussmann’s description in his memoirs of “une carte de Paris, sur laquelle on voyait tracées par Lui-Même, en bleu, en rouge, en jaune et en vert, suivant leur degré d’urgence, les différentes voies nouvelles qu’il se proposait de faire exécuter,” in *The Novel Map: Space and Subjectivity in Nineteenth-century French Fiction* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 175. Haussmann recounts the story in Georges-Eugène Haussmann, *Mémoires du Baron Haussmann: Préfecture de la Seine*, vol. II (Paris: Victor-Havard, 1890), 53.

¹⁴ Fournier, *Paris démoli: Mosaïque de ruines*, lix.

mobilized by the city's ongoing construction is unreadable (and thus unwritable). As journalist Victor Fournel asserts in *Paris nouveau et Paris futur* (1865):

[C]'est que la transformation n'est pas encore sans mélange, et que malgré l'ardeur et la bonne volonté de nos magistrats, il reste toujours ça et là quelques débris de la vieille ville qui font tache et qui attristent le regard. La peau neuve de Paris a des bigarrures qui en détruisent l'unité et l'harmonie. [...] Impossible d'ailleurs de suivre cette incessante mobilité de Paris. Ce qui est vrai au moment où nous l'écrivons ne l'est plus peut-être au moment où cela s'imprime. On a beau faire et vouloir fixer tous ces changements au vol, ils échappent sans cesse.¹⁵

Here again, the writer's task (Fournier's "tâche") is continually frustrated by the variegated textures and contours of Paris-in-progress, the "bigarrures" (Fournel's "tache") marked out by the resilient pockets of old disarray against the capital's harmonious new skin. The city no longer appears as a reliably intelligible construct, a finished entity, languishing instead in the muddled interstice between the overt technical clarity of Haussmann's boulevards and the dark corners and winding streets that once seemed legible (as the courtesan's "verru[s]," "bouton[s]," and "rougeur[s]") to skilled decoders like Balzac.¹⁶ Modernizing Paris troubles reading and thus resists inscription, its discordant, kaleidoscopic landscape always threatening to mutate without warning and evade the grasp of the writer's static word.

As renovations persist and progress even after Haussmann leaves his post as Paris's chief "artiste démolisseur" in 1870, moreover, it becomes clear to early Third Republic writers that the notorious hammer has not yet (and indeed may never) come to rest. In an urban landscape thus containing and consisting of innumerable "chantiers," to borrow Jean-Luc Nancy's formulation, that "se construit en se déconstruisant [...] se désassemble pour s'assembler autrement, pour assembler une incessante altérité toujours transformable, toujours continuée, toujours renouvelée," textual creation must contend with physical demolition, the latter no longer conceivable as a finite process.¹⁷

¹⁵ Victor Fournel, *Paris nouveau et Paris futur* (Paris: Lecoffre, 1865), 25, 29.

¹⁶ Balzac, *Ferragus* / *La Fille aux yeux d'or*, 79.

¹⁷ Jean-Luc Nancy, "Trafic/Déclic," in *La Ville au loin* (Strasbourg: La Phocide, 2011), 76.

The hammer and the pen become coterminous, competing instruments of urban formation; the writer's experience of the urban space is simultaneously its construction, an intervention in its persistently unfolding destruction and renovation. To write a Paris that is always becoming "new," one must first learn to read it in motion, adopting an observational posture that can accommodate and appropriate its asynchronic field. Writing fin-de-siècle Paris, in other words, is simultaneously a coming to terms with reading a spatially and temporally heterogeneous assemblage that resists mimetic mastery *of* and *in* the urban present.

The temporal conflation of the acts of reading and writing necessitated by this sustained crisis of urban legibility would seem to be particularly problematic for the naturalist novel, grounded as it is in a precise reading of the contextual territory. How does one "tout montrer," and convey "ce qui est" in writing, when what "is" one day is seemingly gone the next? In a discussion of Émile Zola's representations of Paris, Christopher Prendergast provides a useful summary of the problem: "In theory, the Naturalist project aimed at an exhaustive cataloguing and mapping of the city, mastering the material by means of its complete transcription."¹⁸ And yet, he continues, "[m]atter in Zola's world, and above all in Zola's city, is always at risk of exceeding the effort of the writing to subjugate it."¹⁹ How, then, does one mitigate this risk and tame the city in text? Through what lens does Paris become knowable and inscribable? The answer, I propose, has everything to do with the extraordinary proliferation of prostitutes in fin-de-siècle fiction, those naturalist *filles aux cent mille romans*.

¹⁸ Prendergast, *Paris and the Nineteenth Century*, 71.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 72.

Mapping prostitution

“The existence of prostitution on a scale so widespread and obvious that it alarmed contemporaries,” art historian Hollis Clayson has argued, “was a distinctive and distinguishing feature of nineteenth-century Parisian culture.”²⁰ This profusion of prostitutes that swarmed the streets of the capital and the imaginary of their beholders, and the accompanying proliferation of fictional and non-fictional texts devoted to the topic, attest to the degree to which anxieties about venal commerce were imbricated in the social fabric of everyday life in mid-nineteenth-century Paris. As the contours of Parisian prostitution were blurred around mid century by a diversification of venal practice, these anxieties became fundamentally spatialized, reflecting a more profound apprehension about the threat posed to individual identity by the lived experience of urban modernity.

In a basic sense, prostitution has always had a map, as a practice localizable through the real or imagined charting of the city’s erogenous zones as “red-light districts” or “quartiers chauds.” In the context of nineteenth-century France, however, this spatial disposition is overlain with a taxonomy of prostitutional practice, a conceptual mapping attributable to a policy known as *réglementarisme*. Most influentially delineated in doctor and hygienist Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet’s monumental study *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris considérée sous le rapport de l’hygiène publique, de la morale et de l’administration* (1836), published three years after Balzac’s *Ferragus*, the reglementarist system emanated from an understanding of prostitution as a necessary evil, “un torrent qu’il faut supporter, tout en le resserrant dans des digues aussi étroites que possible”: an abidable if

²⁰ Hollis Clayson, *Painted Love: Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2003), 1. Clayson’s study of representations of Parisian prostitution in impressionist art is among the few critical works to address the multifarious nature of prostitutional practice in the late nineteenth century; though my emphasis is on narrative fiction, and on the spatial and temporal disposition of prostitution, this study has benefited from her incisive analysis. This aspect of Clayson’s argument is a common one. In a seminal article, for instance, Griselda Pollock observes that “many of the canonical works held up as the founding monuments of modern art treat precisely with this area, sexuality, and this form of it, commercial exchange.” Griselda Pollock, “Modernity and the Spaces of Femininity,” in *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art* (New York: Routledge, 1988), 75.

undesirable form of disorder that could be canalized and tamed in order to assure the proper functioning of society.²¹ In language that prospectively identifies the shared concerns of prostitutional regulation and Haussmannian urbanism, Parent-Duchâtelet pronounces that “[l]es prostituées sont aussi inévitables, dans une agglomération d’hommes, que les égouts, les voiries et les dépôts d’immondices.”²² The hygienist’s correlation of prostitutes with the urbanistic structures that contain the city’s waste reveals their equivocal position on the social map of nineteenth-century Paris. Receptive vessels for the disruptive flows of (male) desire, prostitutes also incorporate and perpetuate those flows with their circulating bodies, which Parent-Duchâtelet’s phrase preemptively channels into the discursive “digue” of reglementarism. Setting his sights on a class of publicly debauchorous women “que l’administration doit suivre et surveiller avec le plus grand soin,” Parent-Duchâtelet thus argues for the necessity of “tolérance,” a policy of measured and moderated delinquency that allows for the satisfactory discharge of male desire but staunches the flows that threaten to sweep up male subjects in the prostitute’s circulation.²³

In principle, the reglementarist system Parent-Duchâtelet documents was simple. Neither legal nor illegal, officially tolerated prostitution operated “sous l’empire d’une police spéciale.”²⁴ All

²¹ Alexandre-Jean-Baptiste Parent-Duchâtelet, *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris, considérée sous le rapport de l’hygiène publique, de la morale et de l’administration: ouvrage appuyé de documents statistiques puisés dans les archives de la préfecture de police*, ed. Adolphe Trébuchet and Poirat-Duval, vol. 2, 3rd ed. (Paris: J.B. Baillière et Fils, 1857), 319. For two masterful analyses of Parent-Duchâtelet’s work on prostitution, see “Parent-Duchâtelet: Engineer of Abjection” in Charles Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 8–33 and “Parent-Duchâtelet et le réglemmentarisme” in Corbin, *Les filles de noce*, 13–35. It is worth noting that the idea of regulating rather than suppressing prostitution was not new; Restif de la Bretonne had proposed a utopian “projet de règlement pour les prostituées” in *Le Pornographe* (1769) (cited and dismissed by Parent-Duchâtelet). Indeed the adoption of reglementarist policy in France predates Parent-Duchâtelet’s work by nearly thirty years. As historian Jill Harsin clarifies in a useful overview of the system, the characteristic practices of reglementarism “began to be implemented in 1810.” In Jill Harsin, *Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), 6.

²² Parent-Duchâtelet, *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris, considérée sous le rapport de l’hygiène publique, de la morale et de l’administration*, 2:338.

²³ Alexandre-Jean-Baptiste Parent-Duchâtelet, *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris: considérée sous le rapport de l’hygiène publique, de la morale et de l’administration*, ed. Adolphe Trébuchet and Poirat-Duval, vol. 1, 3rd ed. (Paris: J. B. Baillière et Fils, 1857), 25–26.

²⁴ Léo Taxil, *La prostitution contemporaine: Étude d’une question sociale* (Paris: Librairie populaire, 1884), 3.

prostitutes were required to register with the moral police (the *Brigade des mœurs*), thereby submitting to regular surveillance, hygienic checks for venereal disease at the *Dispensaire de salubrité*, and a series of regulations designating where, when, and by what means they were allowed to solicit clients. By putting her name on the books, the registered prostitute (thereafter known as a *fille soumise* or *fille inscrite*, an “obedient” or “inscribed” whore) agreed to ply her corporeal wares in one of two spaces: ideally, as a *fille de maison* in a tolerated brothel (*maison de tolérance*), a residential whorehouse whose proprietors obtained an official license (a *tolérance*) to house prostitutional practice; or alternatively, as *filles isolées en carte* (“registered whores at large”), selling their sex on the street but only at prescribed hours, in strictly delimited spaces, and in accordance with a host of other conditions governing their appearance and practice. In either iteration, the goal of registration is containment; once the prostitute is inscribed, as Parent-Duchâtelet writes, “le désordre cesse à l’instant, ou devient moindre; les prostituées s’y contiennent et ne se disséminent plus.”²⁵

The primary instrument of the reglementarist system was known as the *mise en carte*, the official inscription that made the registered prostitute subject to surveillance and medical examination by the authorities, but also, I want to suggest, put her “on the map,” designating where, when, and how she was to appear. We might thus consider reglementarism an iteration of what philosopher Jacques Rancière denotes the police order, a distribution of bodies “qui fait que tels corps sont assignés par leur nom à telle place et à telle tâche” and makes visible the dominant perceptual cartography of the disciplinary grid.²⁶ The registered prostitute who did not comply with these regulations, or who fled from a tolerated brothel without submitting to the process of official *radiation* or removal from the registers, was said to be *en rupture de ban* (“outside the law,” but more

²⁵ Parent-Duchâtelet, *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris*, 1:270.

²⁶ Jacques Rancière, *La méésentente: politique et philosophie* (Paris: Galilée, 1995), 52.

precisely, not in compliance with the liminal legal space accorded to “tolerated” prostitutes); she risked arrest, reinscription, or imprisonment.

By the 1850s and the 1860s, however, and especially in the first decades of the Third Republic, a much greater threat was what historian Alain Corbin characterizes as “la lente et partielle désagrégation des procédures carcérales mises en place durant la première partie du siècle:” the marked shift toward clandestine prostitution, a bevy of distinct practices subsumed under the category of *filles insoumises*.²⁷ As reglementarism lost its hold on the prostitutional landscape, its disciplinary conduits eroded by urban renovations and (as Corbin has shown) a general bourgeoisification of desire, an atomized and dispersed array of spaces and practices surfaced in its wake: the *brasserie à femmes*, the *café-concert* and *bal de barrière*, the *maison de rendez-vous* (to name only a few). The flourishing of these clandestine practices spurred the adoption of a rapidly expanding and evolving lexicon capable of locating these “unlocalizable” whores in text, put to use both by administrative and common observers: the *fille de maison*, *fille soumise*, and *fille inscrite* of registered prostitution were joined by the *fille de brasserie* or *serveuse*, the *fille du trottoir* or *fille de la rue*, the *fille à soldats*, and a host of others. I explore this alternative taxonomy below and in the chapters that follow.

In the introduction to his magisterial *Figures of Ill Repute* (1989), Charles Bernheimer comments on the terminology he employs in his analysis of representations of prostitution in nineteenth-century France. While noting that period sources “delight[t] in classifying and labeling venal women,” and that in these studies “the differences are rehearsed between a *pierreuse*, *femme de maison*, *insoumise*, *femme à parties*, *femme galante*, *femme entretenue*, *femme de spectacles et de théâtres* and so forth,” he proposes that “the categories themselves are of little value for interpretation” and thus

²⁷ Corbin, *Les filles de noce*, 481.

distinguishes only between the prostitute and the courtesan.²⁸ For Bernheimer, whose psychoanalytic reading proposes that the prostitute's ubiquity in nineteenth-century literature and art stems from "her function in stimulating artistic strategies to control and dispel her fantasmatic threat to male mastery," the prostitutional lexicon is an unnecessary complication of a more general identification of writing on prostitution as a modern practice of mastery. Though I concur with Bernheimer's reading on many points, and do not dispute his interpretation of prostitutional writing as a means of containing and defusing the disruptive desire of commercialized female sexuality, my own purpose and method are distinct: I want to propose that it is precisely this breed of classification that makes the prostitute a privileged site and vehicle of narrative in later nineteenth-century France, and that it is through this verbal and spatial mapping that authorial mastery is asserted.

The most influential modern analysis of this classificatory system, which is delineated in myriad moral, medical, and administrative treatises from throughout the century, is Corbin's *Les Filles de nocé* (1978). Tracing the evolution of prostitutional and disciplinary practices in nineteenth-century France – from Parent-Duchâtelet's elaboration of the reglementarist system in the 1830s, to the shift toward clandestine forms of prostitution in the 1860s and 1870s, to the debates between abolitionists and neo-reglementarists at the turn of the century – Corbin explores a series of categories, official and otherwise, that overlap in some cases with those I address here. Whereas Corbin turns to literary works for evidence of the trends described in the treatises, however, and interprets all forms of clandestine prostitution as indicative of an *embourgeoisement* of society and its desires, I contend that the distinctiveness of *filles de maison*, *filles de brasserie*, *filles de la rue*, and *courtisanes* is fundamental to the representation of a space and time whose fragmentation is replicated by the splintering of the reglementarist monolith into an array of dispersed practices. Simply put: in my reading, space matters beyond the confines of the closed spaces of reglementarism. The spatial and

²⁸ Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute*, 6.

conceptual mapping of registered and clandestine prostitutes alike, I propose, represents a striving for mastery, one that exceeds the desire to control the prostitute's sexuality. As realist and naturalist authors look to textualize space in the early Third Republic, I hold that they recur to the spatializing text of prostitution's classificatory schema, a map that allows for the anchoring of the observing subject against an unstable landscape.

The main argument of this dissertation, and of each of the chapters that follow, is divided into two parts. First, through an examination of the conceptual and physical spaces of prostitution and their representation in naturalist fiction, I contend that the prostitute is *mise en carte*: plotted as a landmark, a corporeal site that is contained in space and in text in order to locate an authorial position from which a Paris rendered illegible by the scope and pace of its modernization becomes readable and writable. "Standing forward" by virtue of her sex, her inscription, and (etymologically) her name (*pro-stituere*), the prostitute is a localizable figure in a modernizing city that is perceived to resist plotting (understood here as both mapping and narration). With its spatial and conceptual taxonomy, prostitution has a map, and I argue that naturalist authors make use of this map in order to affirm their narrative mastery of "la grande prostituée" and thereby consolidate their literary authority. Though most often thematized as a disorienting, self-destructing, and entropic figure (like Nana, whom Zola famously describes as "corrompant et désorganisant Paris entre ses cuisses de neige"), the prostitute's ever-circulating body offers a space that encapsulates the seduction of modernity but is able to be brought back into line – put in its place – within the confines of a textual cartography. Reconfiguring in the space of narrative the lived landscape of Paris and the author's place within it, this textual inscription simultaneously mobilizes and disrupts the reglementarist paradigm and the "police order" it makes perceptible.

If the prostitute's unruly body is (as I argue) located and brought under control by being 'mapped' onto the grid of narrative, however – much as she is *mise en carte* by reglementarism's moral

authorities – in what ways might she also evade or disrupt this mapping, this appropriation? In other words, what points or practices of subversion are inscribed within this venal cartography, and what happens when the prostitute ‘writes’ back? These are questions that subtend the second phase of my argument. Here, my thinking is informed by the distinction that French cultural theorist Michel de Certeau draws in *L’Invention du quotidien* (1980) between “strategy” and “tactics” as distinct modes of negotiating space and time.²⁹ Strategy, in its Certalian acceptance, is the disciplinary province of the powerful. The strategic regime circumscribes space in order to consolidate its authority, delineating a “proper” place (*lieu propre*) through the exercise of the surveillant gaze. This, to my mind, is the operational mode of both the reglementarist order and the Balzacian paradigm of possession of “cette grande courtisane.” Tactics, on the other hand, are the desituated and contingent practices of the weak, those everyday subjects who operate surreptitiously within the confines of a strategic grid where they lack a ‘proper’ place. Tacticians such as urban walkers and novel readers, to borrow two of Certeau’s iconic examples, “write” spatial stories as they move through another’s terrain, poaching time and agency from the cracks of the dominant paradigm. It is along these lines that I argue that the prostitute resists narrative mapping through her tactical practice of space, subverting the cartographic mastery of the city that is articulated upon her body.

I focus primarily on narrative fiction produced in the 1870s, 1880s, and 1890s, and particularly male-authored realist and naturalist novels. Though the works I address are not meant to constitute a representative survey of prostitutional fiction, I do identify thematic and formal concerns common to writing on prostitution across this corpus and beyond, making frequent reference to works that I do not analyze in depth. I emphasize narrative fiction in the realist and naturalist tradition over other forms of representation advisedly, as the prostitute’s role in the spatial and temporal plotting of urban modernity (and, to borrow Janet Beizer’s elegant formulation, “the

²⁹ Michel de Certeau, *L’Invention du quotidien, 1. Arts de faire*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1990).

stories nineteenth-century French culture used to represent itself”) is fundamental to my argument.³⁰

As the prostitute’s pervasive mobility was chief among the social paranoias articulated around her body in nineteenth-century France, this stretching of space onto the temporal axis of narrative seems to me a fruitful and even necessary consideration. In addition to fiction, I draw extensively on cultural and social history, adducing a vast series of moral, medical, and police treatises (by Parent-Duchâtelet and his many late-century imitators and followers) devoted to the prostitudinal problem.

In Chapter One, I analyze representations of the *maison de tolérance* in Joris-Karl Huysmans’s *Marthe, Histoire d’une fille* (1876) and Edmond de Goncourt’s *La Fille Élisa* (1877), that bastion of reglementarism whose existence was already threatened by Haussmann’s refacing of Paris and shifting modalities of desire at the time of the novels’ publication. Positing the tolerated brothel as the site of a nostalgic longing for a recognizable disorder that can be reordered through text, I illustrate how it becomes a space of what I term “synchronic nostalgia,” a site for the recovery of the lost time and containable pleasure associated with old Paris. In both novels, however, the brothel is shown to be the site of an uncanny narrative return suggestive of incomplete mastery, one that brings to light the tenuousness of the naturalist paradigm to which these works ostensibly ascribe.

In Chapter Two, I turn to the *brasserie à femmes*, a female-staffed bar and house of clandestine prostitution where the servers sell stories as a supplement to beer and sex, simultaneously fueling novelistic and sexual desire. Through a reading of Huysmans’s *À Rebours* (1884), Adolphe Tabarant’s little-known novel *Virus d’amour* (1886), and Maurice Barrès’s *Les Déracinés* (1897), I argue that the *fille de brasserie* turns the typical prostitudinal plot on its head by appropriating the art of writerly tease, creating and deferring desire and inscribing the willing consumers of her text in an alternative

³⁰ Janet Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies: Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 9.

plot. By positioning herself as author, I suggest, the brasserie whore troubles her own textual inscription and complicates authorial mastery of both the prostitute and the city.

Chapter Three attends to Émile Zola's mobilization of prostitutional metaphors in the *Rougon-Macquart* series, arguing that Zola deploys the prostitute's entropic force in *Nana* (1880) to dismantle the Paris of his predecessors, Balzac and Haussmann, and clear the ground for the construction of a properly Zolian Paris in *Au Bonheur des Dames* (1883). Despite the contextual specificity of his naturalist aesthetic, Zola largely eschews the taxonomic lexicon of reglementarism in his novel devoted to prostitution, rendering Paris as a dissolute and disorderly "bordel." In realizing the imperial vision of Paris as a whorehouse, previously figured in *La Curée* (1872) as an aspiration to turn the city into "le mauvais lieu de l'Europe," Nana "disorganizes" the capital, her spatial and semantic circulation splintering the urban landscape into an array of sites and signs that Zola will recompose and reorder in *Au Bonheur des Dames*'s titular "maiso[n] de tolérance du commerce." This ostensibly regulated house of commerce, however, simultaneously inscribes a clandestine *brasserie à dames*, selling women a story of their own desire in order to incorporate all of Paris into Zola's urbanistic machine.

In Chapter Four, I turn to representations of clandestine street prostitution, which was the locus of anxieties about both a perceived inability to distinguish between prostitutes and "honest" women and the precarious and potentially contagious visibility of the unregistered *fille insoumise*. In an analysis of Charles-Louis Philippe's *Bubu de Montparnasse* (1901), a novel lauded by André Gide and T.S. Eliot upon its publication but largely ignored by modern critics, I pursue the political and aesthetic implications of the street prostitute's 'disobedient' practice of urban space. Demonstrating first that the pimp is plotted as an authorial avatar that serves to bring the streetwalking prostitute's unruly and unintelligible body under textual control, I then draw upon the work of Rancière and

Certeau to argue that the *fille du trottoir*'s tactics trace an alternate mode of mapping that disrupts paradigms of mastery from within.

My conclusion surveys the landscape of prostitution in contemporary France, exploring the recent reprisal of nineteenth-century reglementarist discourse in both political debates over prostitution's legal status and fictional representations of fin-de-siècle prostitution. From the 2003 *loi sur la sécurité intérieure* (known as the *loi Sarkozy*) that prohibited "passive solicitation" in the streets of Paris, to UMP delegate Chantal Brunel's 2010 proposal to the Assemblée Nationale that a system of tolerated brothels be reestablished in France, to Minister of Women's Rights Najat Vallaud-Belkacem's 2012 proposition that would abolish prostitution altogether, current anxieties surrounding the place and shape of prostitution resonate uncannily with the neoreglementarist and abolitionist polemics of the late nineteenth century. Reading this imbrication alongside recent representations of the tolerated brothel in French cinema and popular visual media – Canal Plus's television series *Maison Close* (2010-2013), Abdellatif Kechiche's film *Vénus noire* (2010), and Bertrand Bonello's film *L'Apollonide, Souvenirs de la maison close* (2011) – I identify this nostalgia for and romanticization of fin-de-siècle reglementarism as a mapping of pervasive concerns about the "traite des femmes" and the legibility of contemporary Paris, exploring what nineteenth-century French literature has to teach us about the stakes and possibilities of the mapping of prostitution then and now.

Chapter One

An Unhomely Home: Naturalist Nostalgia and the *Maison de tolérance*

Joris-Karl Husymans, *Marthe, Histoire d'une fille* (1876) and Edmond de Goncourt, *La Fille Élisa* (1877)

Paris, le bordel de l'étranger...

- Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Journal*, March 29, 1863

“C’est là ce que nous avons eu de meilleur!”¹ The famous last words of Gustave Flaubert’s “roman moderne parisien” *L’Éducation sentimentale* (1869), spoken by Frédéric and reiterated by Deslauriers as the two friends reminisce about a visit some thirty years earlier to la Turque’s brothel in Nogent, seem to locate the “best” of narrative times in the past and in the *maison close*.² As it has for many young men before them (or so the legend goes), the brothel here serves as the site of a landmark episode in Frédéric’s and Deslauriers’s sentimental formation. A closer look at the nostalgic “[c]’est là” of Flaubert’s ending, however, reveals la Turque’s *maison* to be a multiply evasive “lieu de perdition” (literally, a place of loss or ruin), an equivocal locus of textual dislocation.³ First, the friends’ virile initiation is a false start; the expected sexual encounter is a non-event, unconsummated due to the embarrassment that ensues from Frédéric’s clumsy adolescent overtures. What pleasure there is to be had lies not in the seeing or the doing – indeed, Frédéric’s flight from *chez la Turque* results in part from the overwhelming “plaisir de voir, d’un seul coup d’œil, tant de femmes à sa disposition” – but rather in the telling, in the palimpsestic layers of memory that the adult Frédéric and Deslauriers “se [...] contèrent prolixement, chacun complétant les souvenirs

¹ Gustave Flaubert, *L’Éducation sentimentale*, ed. Stéphanie Dord-Crouslé (Paris: Flammarion, 2001). Among the many superb analyses of this scene, whose place in (or outside) Flaubert’s novel lies outside the scope of this chapter, see Charles Bernheimer’s “The Idea of Prostitution in Flaubert” in *Figures of Ill Repute*, 141–147; Peter Brooks’ “Retrospective Lust, or Flaubert’s Perversities” in *Reading for the Plot* (210–215); and Christopher Prendergast’s *The Order of Mimesis: Balzac, Stendhal, Nerval, Flaubert* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 229–231.

² Here, and throughout this chapter unless otherwise specified, I use “maison close” to refer to the generic (that is, not temporally or locationally specific) brothel, and “maison de tolérance” or “tolérance” to refer to the “tolerated” brothel of reglementarist policy in nineteenth-century France.

³ Flaubert, *L’Éducation sentimentale*, 551. Bernheimer also notes the literal meaning of the phrase (*Figures*, 142).

de l'autre."⁴ Second, the brothel itself resists localization, denoted elliptically by the town's residents ("l'endroit que vous savez, – une certaine rue, – au bas des ponts") and textually identified only by shiftily demonstratives ("c'est," "ce que") and the chronotopic deictic "là" (both "then" and "there").⁵ Finally, the abortive rite of passage, resurrected from memory into the eternal present of the narrative's close, is temporally troublesome. Referring to a time that predates the text's diegetic scope, it is a look back at that which, narratively speaking, never was – or, at least, was only ever referential, an enigmatic "allusion à une aventure commune" near the beginning of the novel likely to remain unnoticed to the uninitiated reader.⁶ Far from a simple case of nostalgia, this is an uncanny return to a "house" that was never there (and yet is only "là"), an ironic "excavation" of an absent *mauvais lieu*.

At first glance, this ambiguous brothel scene would hardly seem to be an illustrative site of the "solidité"⁷ and "vérité vraie, [...] terre à terre, exacte" that lead Zola to crown *L'Éducation sentimentale* "le modèle du roman naturaliste"⁸ and Huysmans to name it the school's "parangon," "une véritable bible."⁹ After all, as we noted in the introduction, the naturalist novel is paradigmatically a "page de marbre tirée d'un bloc de la réalité,"¹⁰ a precisely located, impassively carved slice of life grounded in "l'observation directe, l'anatomie exacte, l'acceptation et la peinture

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid., 69. Bernheimer rightly remarks that the book's final phrase "annihilates the novel's temporal unfolding by carrying us backward to a point before its beginning" (*Figures*, 146).

⁷ Émile Zola, *Le Roman expérimental*, ed. François-Marie Mourad (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 2006), 140.

⁸ Émile Zola, "Revue dramatique et littéraire," in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Mitterand, vol. XII (Paris: Cercle du livre précieux, 1969), 606–609. (Article from *Le Voltaire*, 9 Dec. 1879).

⁹ J.-K. Huysmans, "Préface écrite vingt ans après le roman," in *A rebours*, ed. Daniel Grojnowski (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 2004), 321. On the influence of *L'Éducation sentimentale* on naturalist writers, including Zola and Huysmans, see David Baguley, *Naturalist Fiction: The Entropic Vision* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 91–94, and Larry Duffy, *Le Grand Transit Moderne: Mobility, Modernity and French Naturalist Fiction* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 87–90.

¹⁰ Zola, "Le Naturalisme au théâtre," 142.

de ce qui est.”¹¹ Founded and constructed on the textual mapping of a demarcated, synchronic territory, it takes “le terrain solide” thus established as the “point de départ” for the diachronic narrative itinerary (the Zolian *expérience*).¹² Aspiring to “tout montrer,” the naturalist “là” is ostensibly a more reliable signifier than Frédéric’s, the latter revealing only an absence, pointing to a referent that is on decidedly unstable textual grounds. Divested of both its location and its initiatory import, Flaubert’s brothel is the site and emblem of a shifty discursive relay, or what Zola denotes more generally a “continuel avortement”: an endlessly reiterated, redirected passage with no triumphant *telos*, a post-Balzacian *arrivisme* with no *arrivée*.¹³ At once the narrative’s fulcrum and its vanishing point, the *maison close* is here perpetually under construction, leaving the reader to piece together and retrospectively decipher the fragments of the story it engenders; in the novel’s ultimate “effondrement dans [...] le vide,” the onus of meaningful composition – “coordonner les éléments et arriver à un tout homogène” – passes from the writer to the reader.¹⁴

This chapter takes Flaubert’s equivocal scene as its point of departure for an analysis of the place of the brothel, both in its presence and its absence, in the naturalist writing of Paris. For despite an apparent departure from naturalist specificity, the retrospective assemblage required of the reader by Flaubert’s brothel scene is strikingly similar to the readerly (and writerly) challenge posed by the disjunctive, mutating landscape of modernizing Paris. In reading and writing a city containing and consisting of endless “chantiers,” to recall Jean-Luc Nancy’s characterization of the contemporary city, the naturalist writer must confront the space’s mutation – and thus contend with the semiotic impotence of the demonstrative “c’est là.” The naturalist must be “de son temps,” as

¹¹ Ibid., 133.

¹² Zola, “Le Roman expérimental,” *Le Roman expérimental*, 52.

¹³ Zola, “Revue dramatique et littéraire.”

¹⁴ Ibid. Zola attributes *L’Éducation sentimentale*’s coordination to Flaubert’s masterful composition of the novel, which allows it to be read as “la négation même de l’art du romancier.”

Huysmans writes in 1877, but to be “of one’s time” in the Second Empire and early Third Republic is to grapple with the capital’s resistance to being of *one* time, to being read as a synchronic whole.¹⁵ In what follows, we shall see that for two initiatory naturalist “romans modernes parisiens,” the Flaubertian brothel is indeed exemplary, for the (un)timely literary rendering of an urban “vérité” that (to de-center Zola’s idiom) is doubly “terre à terre”: the ground-level representation of a space-in-progress that is never a unified territory, where a coherent narrative map can only be traced through a supple incorporation of asynchronous planes and disjointed landmarks. It is precisely as an equivocal site and object of indication and dislocation, in other words, that the brothel becomes a tentative point of articulation – both a fulcrum and a vanishing point – for the literary mapping of Paris in the later nineteenth century.

Naturalist “Nostalgia”

Composing a naturalist novel “dans une ville qui renferme autant d’éléments de désordre que la capitale,” to borrow a formulation from Third Republic police chief C.J. Lecour, requires deciphering and affixing to text a landscape where the primary constant is inconstancy, the ongoing demolition and reconstruction of fast-paced urbanism presenting a redoubtable challenge to the mimetic inscriber.¹⁶ In this, the author’s undertaking resembles that of the hygienic authorities tasked with classifying and containing Paris’s prostitutes (the veritable object of Lecour’s analysis), who, as the taxonomic force of nineteenth-century reglementarism began to waver late in the century in the face of a flurry of diversified prostitutional practices, likewise had to read and react in motion to a

¹⁵ Joris-Karl Huysmans, “Émile Zola et *L’Assommoir*,” *Œuvres complètes, t.II* (Paris: Crès, 1928), 189. My emphasis. Huysmans would definitively break from naturalism in the 1880s (ending his friendship with Zola) and is of course much better known for his later decadent and spiritualist works such as *À rebours* (1884) and *La-bas* (1891).

¹⁶ C.J. Lecour, *La Prostitution à Paris et à Londres, 1789-1870* (Paris: Asselin, 1870), 148. Lecour is himself citing a contemporary circular on the difficulties of enforcing laws against clandestine prostitution.

fluid, fragmentary field.¹⁷ The cornerstone of the reglementarist system, as we saw in the introduction, was the *maison de tolérance*, a residential whorehouse whose boarders were known as *filles inscrites*, inscribed on the registers of the moral police and thus belonging to the category of officially “tolerated” *filles soumises*.¹⁸ It was a licit illicit space, organized around conflicting principles of disclosure and enclosure: it was to be outwardly distinctive but sexually neutralized; its shutters tightly closed but its outermost door slightly ajar; its façade unremarkable but for an outsized street number (*gros numéro*¹⁹) and a lantern serving to distinguish it from bourgeois homes; impervious to the casual glance of impressionable women but penetrable by the gaze of the authorities. Registered brothel prostitutes were subjected to multiple layers of discipline and surveillance, from within and without: by the *tenancière*, who kept the girls in line and on the premises with a watchful eye and a system of debts that made it difficult for them to leave; by doctors who subjected them to weekly hygienic checks (*visites sanitaires*) to ensure they were free of syphilis; and implicitly by the moral police, who threatened to capture them if they escaped without submitting to the involved process of *radiation*, removal from the official registers.

By the end of the Second Empire, the number of *tolérances* in the capital had fallen into a precipitous and irreversible decline, due in part to Haussmann’s destruction and ‘sanitization’ of the

¹⁷ On the shared containment discourse of July Monarchy *réglementariste* policy and the early nineteenth-century *roman-feuilleton*, see Jann Matlock’s meticulously researched *Scenes of Seduction: Prostitution, Hysteria, and Reading Difference in the Nineteenth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), especially Part I. A major difference between texts of the July Monarchy and the novels I study here is summarized by Matlock’s observation that the earlier works that concern her focus almost exclusively on registered prostitutes (“Of the major literary studies of prostitution between 1830 and 1848, only three allow their heroines to circulate without a permit,” 106). As I show in this chapter, this is not the case in the later nineteenth century novels set in Paris, where the focus shifts largely to various forms of clandestine prostitution.

¹⁸ On the vocabulary and history of the reglementarist system of “tolerated” prostitution (including a discussion of Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet’s monumental study *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris*, which describes the system in great detail and served as a document of reference for literary authors through the end of the century) see Introduction. The French term *maison de tolérance*, like the more general term for the brothel, the *maison close* (the latter, often used in reference to the later nineteenth century, in fact came into usage only in the late 1890s), betrays a play on the relationship between the so-called “house of ill repute” and the domestic interior that has informed this chapter. These residential *mauvais lieux* are, quite literally, “houses” of prostitution: the “house of tolerance,” the “closed house.”

¹⁹ *Maisons de tolérance* were often referred to as *maisons à gros numéro* (and the *filles de maison* as *filles à numéro*).

districts where they had traditionally been clustered – this despite the vigorous efforts of *néoréglementaristes* who viewed the tolerated brothel, with its visual impermeability to honest women and its susceptibility to official surveillance, as the surest way to contain and thus control the “mal nécessaire” of prostitution.²⁰ Haussmann’s attempts to compartmentalize and neutralize the threat of disorder, so effective at rendering other facets of the capital legible to and controllable by municipal authorities, proved counterproductive in the prostitutional realm as the murky, visually equivocal practices of clandestine prostitution filled the void left by the displacement of the city’s *tolérances* (and their traditional working-class clientele) to its periphery. By 1878, only 33% of the 3988 *filles soumises* in Paris resided in a *tolérance*; the rest were *filles isolées en carte*, card-carrying prostitutes who were officially registered and subject to hygienic and moral authority but practiced outside the brothel, soliciting clients at prescribed hours in the streets and turning tricks in *hôtels garnis*. The diminution of tolerated brothel prostitution in Paris relative to smaller French cities, where *filles de maison* continue to predominate, is marked.²¹ What brothels did remain in the city center were forced to evolve to meet the shifting demands of their clients, becoming either clandestine, non-residential *maisons de passe* or *maisons de rendez-vous* or bourgeois-friendly (but still officially “tolerated”) *maisons de luxe* or *grandes tolérances*. Other new establishments around the city’s recently incorporated outskirts, referred to as *maisons à soldats*, catered largely to a military crowd.²² Over the course of the 1860s and

²⁰ As Lecour, then chief of the First Division of the *Préfecture de police*, observed in 1874, “Le monde de la prostitution, établissements et personnel, se transforme d’une manière notable. Le nombre de maisons de tolérance diminue: il ira toujours en décroissant.” According to Lecour, there were 219 Parisian *maisons* in 1851 and only 152 in 1869, this despite Haussmann’s annexation of the Parisian *banlieue* in the interval (and thus an increased territory and population included in the figure; in Paris proper, there were only 134 *maisons* by 1870). *De l’état actuel de la prostitution parisienne* (Paris: Librairie de la faculté de médecine, 1874), 18. See also Lecour’s *La Prostitution à Paris et à Londres, 1789-1870*, 134.

²¹ Alain Corbin, *Les Filles de nocce: Misère sexuelle et prostitution au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 2010), 70.

²² On Haussmann’s destruction of the *quartiers ‘chauds’*, see Corbin 88, 174. Corbin ably demonstrates that the waning popularity and presence of the *tolérance* also (and, in Corbin’s reading, primarily) stemmed from what he calls an *embourgeoisement* of demand, whereby clients sought “une apparence de séduction, un simulacre de sentiment” rather than simply sex (296). I analyze the novelistic treatment of various forms of clandestine prostitution in chapters three and four.

1870s, in short, Paris's prostitutional landscape – like the city itself – “change de physionomie d'un jour à l'autre,” the confining walls of the *maison de tolérance* symbolically eroding into scattered debris alongside the capital's vanishing streets and houses.²³ Both Paris – Balzac's iconic “grande courtisane,” Flaubert's ironic “grande prostituée” – and the prostitute that had long served as its metaphor lose their univocal identity, splintering into an asyndetic proliferation of atomized names and sites that resists reading and can no longer be readily assimilated into a localizable whole, “un tout homogène.”

By the early years of the Third Republic, when urban renewal, clandestine competition and a burgeoning abolitionist movement threaten its existence, the Parisian tolerated brothel is thus a dwindling relic of the old prostitutional order, decidedly not “de son temps.”²⁴ And yet, despite the apparent risk of anachronism inherent in depicting this unfashionable bastion of reglementarism in the late 1870s, when glamorous courtesans and the *demi-monde* dominate the Parisian prostitutional imaginary, both Huysmans and Edmond de Goncourt choose the tolerated brothel as the site and setting of a writerly rite of passage: Huysmans in his first novel, *Marthe, Histoire d'une fille* (1876), and Goncourt in his first novel written without his brother Jules, *La Fille Élisa* (1877).²⁵ There was much at stake in these coeval texts, which inaugurate what would quickly become a naturalist fixation with

²³ Lecour, *La Prostitution à Paris et à Londres, 1789-1871*, 119.

²⁴ The most vocal proponents of abolitionism, which sought to end government regulation of prostitution in order to discourage debauchery and usher women back into the family home, were Yves Guyot and Dr. Louis Fiaux. Both published monographs decrying the pernicious effects of reglementarism. See Yves Guyot, *La Prostitution* (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1882), <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k111207z>; Louis Louis Fiaux, *La police des mœurs en France et dans les principaux pays de l'Europe* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1888), <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k630854>. Fiaux, *La Police des mœurs en France et dans les principaux pays de l'Europe* (Paris: E. Dentu, 1888), <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k630854>, and *Les Maisons de tolérance, leur fermeture* (Paris: G. Carré, 1892), <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k61809r>.

²⁵ Frequently attested in the prostitutional treatises is a sense that the *maison de tolérance* is uniquely impervious to equivocation, as he who enters knows exactly where he is going. Ali Coffignon thus writes in 1889 that “la maison de tolérance a ceci de bon, c'est qu'elle ne revêt pas des dehors hypocrites. On ne s'y aventure qu'à bon escient” [Ali Coffignon, *Paris vivant: La Corruption à Paris* (Paris: Librairie illustrée, 1889), 30]; Charles Virmaître similarly notes in 1893 that “celui qui pénètre dans une maison de tolérance, sait où il va, il y va de son plein gré” [Charles Virmaître, *Trottoirs et lupanars* (Paris: H. Perrot, 1893), 46, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k54328072>].

the Parisian prostitute: Huysmans was an unknown writer looking to make his name, and Goncourt, the old master whose co-authored *Germinie Lacerteux* (1864) had forged the naturalist path into the capital's seedy depths, looked to prove (to himself above all, according to his journal²⁶) that he could venture there alone. A fundamental contention of this chapter, which seeks to reconcile the ostensible modernity of these avowedly naturalist works with the outmodedness of their subject matter, is that Huysmans and Goncourt turn to the fading tolerated brothel in search of contemporary emplacement: to situate and consolidate the authorial self in modern Paris through opposition to the "inscribable" (and thus circumscribable) figure of the brothel prostitute, and thereby to locate a position from which the city becomes – however tenuously – intelligible and writable.²⁷ As Lecour professed in 1874, the tolerated brothel was conceived as "un moyen efficace de localiser le mal," allowing disruptive desires to be channeled into the observable "égoût séminale" and hence prevented from overflowing and contaminating the capital.²⁸ The classificatory efficacy of the panoptic *tolérance* holds not only for the city's moral police, I maintain, but also for the neophyte naturalist author, whose hermeneutic and commercial success is predicated upon mastery of Paris's

²⁶ Edmond de Goncourt undertook most of the preparatory research for the novel with his brother Jules before the latter's death, but set it aside for several years before writing *Élisa*. On the genesis of the novel and the sources of its documentation, see Robert Ricatte's masterful study *La Genèse de La Fille Élisa* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1960). In an entry dated July 23, 1875, Edmond betrays his anxiety about the production of this "first" novel: "Aujourd'hui, j'ai écrit en grosses lettres sur la première feuille d'un cahier blanc: *la fille Élisa*. Puis ce titre écrit, j'ai été pris d'une anxiété douloureuse, je me suis mis à douter de moi-même [...] j'ai peur d'une œuvre que je ne commence plus avec la confiance que j'avais, quand *lui*, il travaillait avec moi." Shortly after *Élisa*'s publication, in a journal entry from March 31, 1877, Edmond reveals his sense of achievement at having "made his name" by penning *Élisa* on his own: "Je viens de voir une grande librairie sur un boulevard neuf, qui n'a en montre que *la fille Élisa*, étalant par toutes ses vitrines, aux gens qui s'arrêtent, mon nom, mon nom seul."

²⁷ These are the first but also the only two novel-length naturalist works by major writers to depict a Parisian tolerated brothel. Here I somewhat disagree with Hollis Clayson's assertion that "the brothel prostitute may have been more suitable for a 'modern' verbal account than a 'modern' visual one," at least with regard to naturalism [*Representations of Prostitution in Early Third Republic France* (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1984), 81]. This may well have been the case for the provincial brothel, which Maupassant famously rendered in "La Maison Tellier" (1881) and Jean Lorrain would return to mourn in *La Maison Philibert* (1904). The Parisian *maison de tolérance*, however, is noticeably absent from major naturalist works, with the exception of *Marthe*, *Élisa*, and Robert Caze's novella *La Sortie d'Angèle* (1882). In Zola, for example, it is only a metaphor for Bordenave's theater in *Nana* and the eponymous *Au Bonheur des Dames*; see Chapter Three of this study.

²⁸ Lecour, *La Prostitution à Paris et à Londres, 1789-1870*, 137. Lecour is himself indirectly quoting Guy Delavau, a former prefect of police, who passed the initial 1823 regulation that sought to enclose all prostitution in *maisons de tolérance*.

rowdy lower circles. The narrative inscription of the tolerated brothel, in other words, effects a multiple “localisation”: containing and locating both the “mal” (understood here, following Lecour, as prostitutional practice) and the *mâle*, the male author whose urban and literary authority is anchored on keeping the prostitute in place. Allowing the author to situate the prostitute’s story-worthy body without being caught in her – or the capital’s – semiotic circulation, the brothel thus narrativized initially acts as an architectural avatar for what Georg Simmel terms “reserve,” shielding the urban subject from the jarring vicissitudes (the “fluctuations and discontinuities”) of the metropolitan milieu by housing them in a provisional form.²⁹ As Laure Adler summarizes with respect to the brothel whores who must be inscribed on the official registers in order to live and work in a tolerated brothel, “Pour entrer au bordel il faut en effet s’inscrire.”³⁰ I hold that the reverse order pertains for Huysmans and Goncourt, who must, albeit in very different ways, turn – or return – to the tolerated brothel in order not only to reinscribe these “inscribed” prostitutes in narrative, but also to “s’inscrire” themselves, to commit their name and their authority to text.³¹

This discursive enclosure of the *maison de tolérance* proves equivocal, however. It betrays a nostalgic longing for a containable, habitable disorder that can provide narrative interest and allow for mimetic representation, but that very nostalgia threatens to reveal the porosity and fragility of a text that aspires to observational mastery of modern Paris. The breed of urban nostalgia that I see as informing *Marthe* and *La Fille Élisa* has little to do with the more familiar Baudelairean model, or what architectural critic Anthony Vidler terms “laments for a Paris irrevocably disappeared.”³² Though many Parisian houses of tolerance were displaced by modernization or had taken on new

²⁹ Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” in *On Individuality and Social Forms* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1972), 325.

³⁰ Laure Adler, *Les maisons closes: 1830-1930* (Paris: Hachette Littératures, 2008), 88.

³¹ Lecour, *La Prostitution à Paris et à Londres, 1789-1870*, 124.

³² Anthony Vidler, “*Paris démolit/Paris Futur*,” in *The Scenes of the Street and Other Essays* (New York: Monacelli, 2011), 234.

forms, Huysmans and Goncourt are more or less compliant with contemporary reality: the brothels depicted in both works could have existed in their diegetic time, and thus do not belong *a priori* in the past. What I am here naming the novels' "synchronic nostalgia" responds, rather, to the challenge of writing and writing from precarious territory, of grappling with the constantly evolving landscape of a Paris under construction in the midst and wake of Haussmannization. Here, nostalgia is the search for a legible and narratable present amid the past echoes and future emergences of modernization, the contingent grasping for an alternative spatial order that can be transposed onto a stable literary map: in short, more a re-membering, a re-composition of a fissured narrative field, than a remembrance. In both novels, the *maison de tolérance* becomes the site of an uncanny *nostos*, a narrative return suggestive of incomplete mastery; that this "unhomely home" is ultimately not representable in a synchronic diegetic present, as we will discover over the course of this chapter, brings to light the tenuousness of the naturalist paradigm to which these novels ostensibly ascribe.

Appropriating the Prostitute

These "first" novels by Huysmans and Goncourt, we have noted, are also the first naturalist texts to narrativize "non-clandestine" brothel prostitution – and indeed, both authors are explicitly concerned from the outset with staking a territorial claim. Each work begins with a preface, and each preface begins with a self-citation that preemptively grounds the novel in a previously affirmed authority: Huysmans asserting his precedence with respect to Goncourt's novel by reproducing the "acte de naissance" he had appended to *Marthe*'s first (Belgian) edition, and Goncourt quoting the preface of *Germinie Lacerteux*, founding his first solo effort with the legitimizing rehearsal of his brother's voice.³³ Well beyond the authoritative positioning of their prefatory remarks, *Marthe* and

³³ Huysmans's is more precisely an *avant-propos*, added to the second edition of *Marthe* (published in France in 1879). In a humorous autobiographical portrait published pseudonymously in *Les Hommes d'aujourd'hui* in 1885, Huysmans assesses his first novel: "il fit un roman, le premier en date, sur les filles de maisons, *Marthe*, qui parut en 1876 [...] *L'Assommoir*

Élisa seem (as does naturalist fiction more generally) to operate in what Michel de Certeau terms the “strategic” mode, narratively aspiring to both “une victoire du lieu sur le temps” and “une maîtrise des lieux par la vue.”³⁴ Indeed, subtending this chapter is the sense that both authors are looking to found a *lieu propre*, on multiple (intratextual and extratextual) planes: the first novel that imputes authority to their name, a distinguished place among what Goncourt denotes the “jeune et sérieuse école du roman moderne,” a position of observational mastery in and of a city under construction, a field of intelligible and appropriable narrative interest for these “artistes assoiffés de modernité” in the interstitial muddle of modernization that lies between Balzac’s Paris and Haussmann’s.³⁵ For Huysmans and Goncourt, making a (proper) name on the literary landscape is contingent on making a (proper) place in narrative, and both are contingent on the mimetic mastery of modern Paris and (and through) the prostitute. In going against the grain of technocratic homogenization, Parisian prostitution resists a breed of order perceived as im-proper and insidious, the overt Haussmannian clarity and geometric rigor that threaten to efface all that is literary about the city – its shadows, its curves, its detours, its deviance. Tolerated prostitution, spatially and temporally marginalized in fin-de-siècle Paris, is fertile terrain for (counter)strategic mobilization, allowing the author to

n’avait pas fait encore la formidable trouée que chacun sait. *Marthe* a depuis reparu à Paris et a obtenu un certain succès. Ce livre renferme, çà et là, des observations exactes, décèle déjà de maladroites qualités de style, mais la langue rappelle trop, suivant moi, celle des Goncourt. C’est un livre de début, curieux et vibrant, mais écourté, insuffisamment personnel.” A. Meunier (pseudonym for J.-K. Huysmans), “J.-K. Huysmans,” *En marge*, ed. Lucien Descaves (Paris: M. Lesage, 1927), 56. Huysmans’s derision of *Marthe*’s linguistic similarities to *La Fille Élisa* is a self-mocking wink at his own past; upon hearing in the mid-1870s that Goncourt was also writing a novel about a registered prostitute, Huysmans, anxious to avoid accusations of undue influence, rushed to publish *Marthe* before *Élisa* could be released. There is some truth, then, behind Huysmans’s playful insistence here that *Marthe* was the first novel to treat brothel prostitutes. On the circumstances of *Marthe*’s publication, see Robert Baldick, *The Life of J.-K. Huysmans* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955), 30–34. Mireille Dottin-Orsini and Daniel Grojnowski, eds., *Un joli monde: Romans de la prostitution* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2008), 3–4.

³⁴ Michel de Certeau, *L’Invention du quotidien, 1. Arts de faire*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 60.

³⁵ Huysmans, “Émile Zola et *L’Assommoir*,” 189. Huysmans would of course definitively break from naturalism in the 1880s (ending his friendship with Zola) and is much better known for his later decadent and spiritualist works such as *À rebours* (1884) and *La-bas* (1891). I discuss *À rebours* briefly later in this chapter, and again at the beginning of Chapter Two.

appropriate a legible breed of disorder that has escaped Haussmannian regularization and thus to “circonscrire un propre dans un monde ensorcelé par les pouvoirs invisibles de l’Autre.”³⁶

Though not as coincident as Huysmans’s anxiety of influence with respect to what he would later term his “ovaire de jeunesse, fécondé par un spermatozoïde égaré de Goncourt” would suggest, *Marthe* and *La Fille Élisa* nevertheless cover similar ground. Huysmans’s short novel opens in the Bobino theater, where Marthe, an actress and singer whose talents lie mainly in her “casque de cheveux opulemment roux” and her “hanches mal contenues dans leur prison de soie,”³⁷ receives an anonymous love poem as she prepares to take the stage.³⁸ The poem’s soon-discovered author, Léo, a middling journalist and Huysmansian avatar with grand authorial aspirations, quickly wins Marthe’s affections, much to the chagrin of the Bobino’s drunken director, Ginginet. Here the narrative suspends its progression and turns to Marthe’s past: we learn in flashback that the protagonist, orphaned at the age of fifteen and equipped with a hereditary laziness and “disposition à la névrose,” works in a fake pearl factory where bawdy tales of her coworkers’ prosperous exploits lead her to dream of amorous escapades and rich older men (75). After a series of disenchanting encounters with men and an illness that leaves her unable to continue blowing pearls, and after the death of her lover and her newborn child in one frigid (and briskly recounted) night, Marthe “sor[t] de la tourmente, plus fraîche et plus affriolante que jamais” and becomes a brothel prostitute (81). The narrative rejoins its initial progression only after Marthe has fled from the *maison de tolérance*, “cette

³⁶ Certeau, *L’invention du quotidien*, 59.

³⁷ J.-K Huysmans, *Marthe, histoire d’une fille*, ed. Pierre Cogny (Paris: Cercle du livre, 1955), 75. All references to the novel are to this edition unless otherwise noted and will hereafter be cited parenthetically in the text. Bernheimer justly observes that *Marthe* “reads like a kind of inventory of narrative elements derived from the prostitute’s realist plot, strung together in rapid-fire order with little concern for psychological motivation or character development” (*Figures*, 237).

³⁸ The beginning of the novel is strongly reminiscent of Zola’s *Nana* (1880), so much so that its influence on Zola is difficult to deny. Bernheimer lists a number of similarities between the two novels, but seems to imply that Huysmans’s novel is derivative of Zola’s, calling it, for instance, a “novel of borrowed parts” (*Figures*, 238). Robert Ziegler raises the question of “whether the student had inspired the master” in his compelling article “Feminized Reality/Male Realism: The Case of Huysmans’ *Marthe*,” *Australian Journal of French Studies* 31, no. 2 (1994), 189.

geôle infrangible” that alternately inspires her shame and nostalgia, and has been “saved” from prostitutional recidivism by Ginginet’s invitation to become an actress (83). The novel accelerates as it moves through Marthe’s relationship and rupture with Léo, her alcohol-fueled reminiscences about her brothel past, her paralyzing fear of being caught by the police and *mise en carte*, her reunion with the abusive Ginginet, and her ultimate (reported) return to the brothel at the novel’s end.

The preface to *La Fille Élisa* informs the reader of the bifurcated narrative to come: “la prostitution et la prostituée, ce n’est qu’un épisode; la prison et la prisonnière: voilà l’intérêt de mon livre” (98).³⁹ The prostitutional “episode” will be told entirely in flashback, as the novel begins with its protagonist on trial for an as yet unrevealed crime. Élisa, the “prostituée condamnée à mort,” is the daughter of an abusive midwife from the Parisian neighborhood of la Chapelle whose clients practice “l’Amour coupable et la prostitution” (107). After two childhood bouts with typhoid fever leave her inclined to mood swings and fits of passion and rage, she spends her adolescence fighting with her equally mercurial mother and keeping company with young men at debaucherous *bals de barrière*. Initiated and inured “presque dès le berceau” to “tout ce que les enfants ignorent de l’amour,” Élisa soon falls into prostitution, following a client of her mother’s (a *fille de maison* from the Lorraine) to a provincial brothel and becoming a *fille inscrite* (113).⁴⁰ Tiring of the monotony of life in the provincial *tolérance*, Élisa returns to Paris, where she restlessly moves from brothel to brothel before eventually settling into a *maison à soldats* near the École Militaire. As Book Two begins, we find Élisa at the *maison de détention* Noirlieu, her death sentence having been commuted to life in prison under *silence continu* (the characteristic punishment of the Auburn prison system, here

³⁹ Edmond de Goncourt, *Œuvres complètes, t.VIII: La fille Elisa*, ed. David Baguley (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2010), 98. All subsequent references to Goncourt’s novel are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text.

⁴⁰ The novel is insistent on this point; an earlier description mentions that “la révélation des mystères et des hontes du commerce de l’homme et de la femme de Paris [...] vint la trouver dans sa couchette, presque dans son berceau” (107).

sharply criticized by Goncourt).⁴¹ Only here does the reader finally learn the reason for Éliisa's condemnation: she killed her lover, a soldier named Tanchon, in self-defense, after he attempted to rape her in the Bois de Boulogne during a rare excursion from the brothel. The rest of the novel is devoted to Éliisa's silent descent into madness; an authorial intervention in the final chapter informs us of the protagonist's death, which occurs just before she is to be given permission to speak.

Marthe and Éliisa are thus sisters in prostitutional (and naturalist, for that matter) stereotype, their cliché-ridden bodies serving as both the substance and the vehicle of narrative intrigue: perpetually agitated, disorderly and hereditarily disordered, temperamentally predisposed to vice.⁴² Nomadic in body and spirit, these *filles* are marked by a stubborn aversion to stasis that counterbalances their innate "paresse": Marthe is "une singulière fille" with an indomitable yen for money and affection and an ominous "aspiration malade d'inconnu" (75); less driven by *l'or et le plaisir*, Éliisa is nonetheless likewise a "nature capricieuse et mutable" (111). Both protagonists, moreover, are native *Parisiennes*, despite the fact that, as Dr. L. Reuss would note in 1889, "[p]resque toutes les filles publiques viennent de la province; il n'y a qu'un nombre assez restreint de parisiennes parmi les filles soumises de la capitale."⁴³ This commonality is especially notable, as it is the only one to depart from the generic characteristics attributed to prostitutes throughout the century by Parent-Duchâtelet and his followers. In going against the grain of provincial provenance

⁴¹ Indeed Goncourt's avowed goal for the novel is to "parler au cœur et à l'émotion de nos législateurs" in order to fight the unjust Auburn system with his "encre indignée."

⁴² Quoted in Pierre Cogny, "Introduction," *Marthe, histoire d'une fille*, 34.

⁴³ Dr. L[ouis] Reuss, *La Prostitution au point de vue de l'hygiène et de l'administration, en France et à l'étranger* (Paris: J.-B. Baillière et fils, 1889), 12. Reuss goes on to note that over the course of the 1880s, the number of inscribed prostitutes in Paris from the capital represented only 26.95% of the total, compared to 65.39% from the provinces (13). Reuss's subsequent statement that the proportion of prostitutes from Paris was just beginning to increase in the late 1880s suggests that in the 1870s, when both Huysmans's and Goncourt's novels were written, most prostitutes in Paris were not from the capital. Notably, Zola's *Nana* (first appearing in *L'Assommoir* in 1877 and then in *Nana* in 1880) is likewise a Parisian; see Chapter Three.

– much as they eschew faddish *courtisanes* in favor of working-class *filles*⁴⁴ – Huysmans and Goncourt ground their narratives in distinctly Parisian, ground-level terrain, suffusing their pages and the protagonists that mobilize them with the unruly impermanence of the modernizing capital and implicitly harnessing mastery of the city to mastery of the *Parisienn*e’s body.⁴⁵ The *histoire d’une fille*, that is, becomes coextensive with the *histoire d’une ville*, as the recalcitrant disposition of the novels’ eponymous whores resonates with journalist Victor Fournel’s description of a city resistant to narrative incorporation: “Impossible d’ailleurs de suivre cette incessante mobilité de Paris. Ce qui est vrai au moment où nous l’écrivons ne l’est plus peut-être au moment où cela s’imprime. On a beau faire et vouloir fixer tous ces changements au vol, ils échappent sans cesse. Le courant vous dépasse, vous déborde, et flue entre les mains qui cherchent à le saisir.”⁴⁶ Articulating what Richard Terdiman has aptly called “the scandal of disarticulated signs” plaguing the Second Empire’s urban imaginary, Fournel paints Paris as a refractory territory comprised of fugitive plot points, a kaleidoscopic landscape always threatening to mutate without warning and evade the authority of the writer’s static word.⁴⁷ For the observer who looks to apprehend and render the city as a unified, durable plane – as Huysmans writes in an 1875 chronicle, “fixer, [...] par la plume, cet aspect insaisissable et toujours renouvelé du Paris moderne” – its variable space troubles reading and thus resists inscription, the

⁴⁴ Goncourt was well aware of the distinction, writing in his preface that “Les romans à l’heure présente sont remplis des faits et gestes de la prostitution *clandestine*, graciés et pardonnés dans une prose galante et parfois polissonne. Il n’est question dans les volumes florissant aux étagères que des amours vénales de dames aux camélias, de lorettes, de filles d’amour en contravention et en rupture de ban avec la police des mœurs [...]” (*Œuvres complètes*, t.VIII: *La fille Elisa*, 97–98).

⁴⁵ For a different reading of the Parisian brothel in these novels, which however likewise cites Éli

⁴⁶ François Victor Fournel, *Paris nouveau et Paris futur* (Paris: Lecoffre, 1865), 29.

⁴⁷ Richard Terdiman, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 130.

dispersed signs carried along by its “courant” (its flow, its everyday reality, its slippery “vérité terre à terre”) metamorphosing the instant they come into focus.⁴⁸

Despite the troubling nature of the modernizing city’s heterogeneous territory for the naturalist observer who would “tout montrer” in text, the young Huysmans (even prior to his definitive break with naturalism in 1884) locates aesthetic interest precisely in this Paris-in-process, in the interstitial currents traversing and constituting the city’s renovation. The prose poem collection *Croquis parisiens* (1880) takes as its subjects a fragmentary series of “coin[s] désolé[s] de grande ville” undergoing or under threat of demolition or rerouting: the filthy Bièvre river (a “fumier qui bouge”) that Haussmann covers over and transforms into a sewer, the winding rue de la Chine “tronquée et mutilée par la construction d’un hôpital.”⁴⁹ If these susceptible plots are the proposed antidote to Haussmann’s artistically sterile modernity (“la négation de l’ennuyeuse symétrie, l’opposé du banal alignement des grandes voies neuves”), they nonetheless only become worthy of literary attention in the disorienting context of Haussmannization since, as Huysmans writes in “La Bièvre,” “la nature n’est intéressante que débile et navrée.”⁵⁰ Whereas the atomized snapshots of the prose poems provide Huysmans “considerable leverage in managing Parisian space” by transposing it as a series of spatially and temporally disconnected images, however, the metonymic extension of these impressions into the duration of narrative requires making sense of the urban landscape as a synchronic whole by weaving the “coins” into a cohesive and coherent topography.⁵¹ That a revised

⁴⁸ “Pages retrouvées: J.-K. Huysmans, ‘Chroniques parisiennes’ de la *Chronique illustrée* (1875-1876),” presented by Daniel Grojnowski, *Bulletin de la Société J.-K. Huysmans*, 75 (1983), 8-20.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 86, 95-96. “La Bièvre” was first published in *L’Artiste* in 1878 and was reprinted in 1880 in the first edition of the *Croquis*, which also included “La rue de la Chine.” Huysmans would rework and republish “La Bièvre” in 1890. Interestingly, Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet’s first study – published in 1822, well before the works on prostitution and the sewers that made him famous – was a hygienic report about the pollution of the Bièvre.

⁵⁰ Huysmans, *Croquis*, 83.

⁵¹ Charles Nunley, “Huysmans and the Aesthetics of Solitude in *Croquis Parisiens*,” *French Forum* 21, no. 2 (May 1, 1996), 192.

version of the “La Bièvre” classifies the polluted river as “le plus parfait symbole de la misère féminine exploitée par une grande ville” – and that *Marthe* describes its protagonist as “la fille traînée par tous les cloaques des villes” – suggests that Huysmans looks to the prostitute as an itinerant nexus of urbanistic vulnerability, her inscribed body locating the continuously regenerated moment of urban defamiliarization on a transient narrative map (151). The *fille*’s volatile fluidity, commensurate and coextensive with the resistant flows of a city in transition, allows her to be read not as an encapsulating metaphor for Paris itself (as in Balzac), but rather as a nomadic “coin désolé,” a localized embodiment of modern disorder within the unbounded urban space.

Like many authors before and after him – including, of course, Goncourt – Huysmans thus chooses to anchor his first novel on the Parisian prostitute’s wandering body. In embodying the city’s metamorphic disarray, however, the *fille* potentially subjects her observer to the same crisis of legibility that frustrates mimetic transcription of the city itself. Goncourt, a generation older than Huysmans and more unequivocally nostalgic for the pre-Haussmannian city of his youth, is particularly revealing in this regard, as *La Fille Élisa* persistently emphasizes the protagonist’s unrelenting mobility and resistance to mastery: Élisa is variously rendered as “un caractère intraitable,” “un être désordonné dont on ne pouvait rien obtenir, sur lequel rien n’avait prise,” “[u]n esprit mobile, inattentionné, distrait, fuyant” (111, 146). And indeed the narrative’s own precarious “prise” on Élisa’s erratic body is evident. The narrator grapples with Élisa’s unintelligible agitation – “ce besoin inquiet de changement,” “cet incessant dégoût du lieu habité et des gens déjà pratiqués,” “cette perpétuelle et lunatique envie de nouveaux visages, de nouvelles compagnes, de nouveaux milieux” –, the anaphoric reiteration of both “nouveau” and the deictic demonstrative “ce” indicative of a striving to locate the constantly regenerated present by pinning the protagonist in place (and again redolent of Fournel’s account of the futile effort to “faire et vouloir fixer tous ces changements au vol”) (143). The *œ*, a recurrent stylistic trait of both *Élisa* and *Marthe*, is however

(like Flaubert's "ça" and "là") an ambivalent locator: both "this" and "that," "here" and "there," its semantic hold on the protagonists is equivocal. Éliisa, then, is doubly "intraitable": not only "intractable," she also resists being "traité," treated in text.

Reading Goncourt's portrayal of Éliisa in the context of the brothers' characterizations of Second Empire Paris in the *Journal* suggests multiple points of imbrication between the city and the prostitute, situating the novel within a body of locational anxieties haunting the Goncourtian urban imaginary. Both Éliisa's propensity for change and her resistance to discursive containment reflect the subjacent sentiment of a well-known entry from 1860:

Notre Paris, le Paris où nous sommes nés, le Paris des mœurs de 1830 à 1848, s'en va. [...] L'intérieur s'en va. La vie retourne à devenir publique. [...] Tout cela me fait l'effet d'être, dans cette patrie de mes goûts, comme un voyageur. Je suis étranger à ce qui vient, à ce qui est, comme à ces boulevards nouveaux, qui ne sentent plus le monde de Balzac, qui sentent Londres, quelque Babylone de l'avenir. Il est bête de venir ainsi dans un temps en construction: l'âme y a des malaises, comme un homme qui essuierait des plâtres.⁵²

The brothers here lament the passing of Balzac's Paris, a city perceived to have been apprehensible as a complete image⁵³ and metaphorizable as a "grande courtisane." The Parisian "intérieur," they fret, is yielding to a shifty and infinitely permeable urban dwelling, a formless (non-)place (and "temps") always under construction. Edmond de Goncourt, affectively deterritorialized by the inexorable march of Haussmannian modernization (and, by the time he writes *Éliisa*, by his brother's death), is a present and future "étranger," never at home in a space pervaded and eroded by (as the brothers write in 1864) "une certaine circulation d'esprits nerveux, une atmosphère qui dans la retraite la plus absolue, à travers la porte la mieux fermée, passe, vous poursuit, vous tourmente,

⁵² Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Journal* (November 18, 1860). For a persuasive, well-researched analysis of the "interiorization" of Paris under Haussmann, see Sharon Marcus, *Apartment Stories: City and Home in Nineteenth-Century Paris and London*, 1st ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999). See also the analysis of Goncourt's relation to Haussmannian Paris in T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 38.

⁵³ Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, 34.

vous enfièvre.”⁵⁴ As the interior “s’en va,” so too does the exterior (Edmond would write in 1898 that “l’existence n’est plus extérieure”), and along with it a perceived system of boundaries that would render the city intelligible by allowing the observer to delineate a space of presence, a stable “here” and “now.”⁵⁵

How, then, does one give textual form to a formless space without becoming lost in its circulation? If, as I posited at the beginning of this chapter, the prostitute’s narrative role in both *Marthe* and *La Fille Élisa* is to provide a circumscribed locus of urban disorder capable of locating the authorial subject by founding a peripatetic here and now, the question of how to read her – or furthermore, of how she is any more susceptible to being read than the city she approximates – thus far remains unanswered. Indeed, Goncourt’s insecurity about porous urban boundaries resonates with contemporary *néoréglementariste* discourse, which feared that clandestine prostitutes – progressively unleashed from the *maison*’s disciplinary walls by changing tastes and urban renewal – would circulate through the streets with honest women and impressionable young men and thus corrupt citizens incapable of reading the prostitute’s difference, of distinguishing *la fille* from *la femme*. The *fille inscrite*, deterritorialized by modernization, thus threatens to engender misreadings as she (like urban life itself, according to Goncourt) “retourne à devenir publique.” As we will see in the next section, the proposed solution to the problem of the prostitute’s legibility lies in her reterritorialization: the deployment of what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari define as “un ensemble d’artifices par lesquels un élément, lui-même déterritorialisé, sert de territorialité nouvelle à

⁵⁴ June 3, 1864. In Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, *Journal*, t.II (1864-1878), ed. A. Ricatte (Paris: Flammarion, 1959), 51. This description recalls the hysteric frenzy at the heart of the brothers’ *Germinie Lacerteux*, also published in 1864. Indeed Goncourt’s preface to *La Fille Élisa* cites the brothers’ preface to *Germinie*, situating it in the same “sentiment de curiosité intellectuelle et de commisération pour les misères humaines” as the earlier naturalist work (and perhaps symbolically founding the text with Jules’s authority). Goncourt, *La fille Élisa*, 97.

⁵⁵ Edmond de Goncourt, *La maison d’un artiste* (Paris: E. Fasquelle, 1898), 2.

l'autre qui n'a pas moins perdu la sienne."⁵⁶ By consigning their protagonist to the outmoded and displaced *maison de tolérance*, and thus making the naturalist *histoire de fille* a "sévère monographie de la prostituée *non clandestine*," Huysmans and Goncourt are provisionally able to apprehend the prostitute, who now, reterritorialized, "retourne à devenir" *inscrite*.

Domesticating Disorder

Born of the tortuous disarray of the *bas-fonds* of old Paris and embodying the frenetic circulation of urban modernity, these prostitutes are seductive, narratively productive (and commercially viable) protagonists whose agitation occasions the chance encounters that provide intrigue, yet threatens to elude the narrator's gaze. Both *Marthe* and *La Fille Élisa* depict the tolerated brothel as a fated destination for their heroine and their narrative, beginning *in medias res* – and, as previously mentioned, well after the eponymous *fille*'s initial entry into official prostitution, as if doubly ensuring her mapping to a space that will at once contain her transgressive mobility and sustain her creative disorder. Recounting the venal domestication only in retrospect, Huysmans and Goncourt hurry their *filles* into the *tolérance*, positing the house as a site of narratorial relief from a breed of unmitigated urban misery perceived to be, as Huysmans writes, "inénarrabl[e]" (79). Marthe begins "l'apprentissage de ce nouveau métier" of prostitution on the streets, driven by hunger and laziness to *faire le trottoir* after her doctor's orders force her to stop blowing pearls (78). Achieving mastery of her new trade within the space of a paragraph ("elle était passée vassale du premier venu, ouvrière en passions"), Marthe picks up a young "naïf" on one of her promiscuous deambulations and brings him home with her, an "accident [qui] devint bientôt une habitude" (ibid.). When forced out of the miserable apartment with "toutes les allures d'un bouge" they had shared on the rue du Cherche-Midi after his death, Marthe returns briefly to the streets before running into a former

⁵⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille Plateaux* (Paris: Minuit, 1998), 214.

coworker who has become a *fille inscrite*, thus sealing her fate; Marthe's stint in the *atelier* ("l'antichambre de Saint-Lazare"⁵⁷), along with the propensity of the metropolis to occasion compromising contact for women who take to the streets, leads her swiftly to her inevitable destination, the *maison de tolérance*: "Cet incident décida du sort de Marthe. [...] Le lendemain elle était servante attitrée d'une buvette d'amour" (81). After all, the narrator has warned us, "une fille est perdue dès qu'elle voit d'autres filles" (75).⁵⁸

Élisa's initial enclosure is more absolute and more stratified, the narrator's distancing from his heroine even more elaborate (and we should not forget that Élisa, unlike Marthe, is condemned to prison and death before the "prostitutional episode" even begins). Overdetermined by her temperament and consecrated with a definitive *plus-que-parfait*, Élisa's inscription at the Bourlemont brothel occupies the space of a narrative ellipsis, skipping over the sexual rite of passage itself (marked only by three dotted lines) and sealing Élisa's confinement with a *mise en abyme* of retrospective circumscription (in language uncannily reminiscent of *Marthe's*): "Élisa s'était donnée au premier venu. Élisa s'était faite prostituée, simplement, naturellement, presque sans un soulèvement de la conscience. Sa jeunesse avait eu une telle habitude de voir, dans la prostitution, l'état le plus ordinaire de son sexe!" (116). Whereas *Marthe* never leaves the chaos of the city's center, however, Goncourt's narrative uproots Élisa from Paris before naming her a *fille*, situating her

⁵⁷ Here Huysmans's commentary on the *atelier* is in line with prevailing medical and moral discourse, which saw in every *ouvrière* a *fille* in the making. To cite only one representative example: "l'atelier est l'officine, l'école de la débauche pour la fille du pauvre." Dr. Trulié, "La Femme: Essai de sociologie physiologique," in *Archives de toxicologie des maladies des femmes et des enfants nouveau-nés*, ed. Dr. Depaul (Paris: Delahaye et Lecrosnier, 1885), 785. Lecour likewise cites "l'atelier" as a primary cause of prostitution (*La Prostitution à Paris et à Londres*, 246). Huysmans's reference to Saint-Lazare, a hybrid prison-hospital for officially registered prostitutes, seems to foreshadow a typically naturalist ending, whereby Marthe would die in prison (like Élisa) or on the dissection table. The reference is misleading, however, as Marthe will evade the police throughout the novel; it is in fact Ginginet who will be subjected to the disciplinary dissection at the novel's end.

⁵⁸ The polyvalence of the word "filles" (girl/whore) here reinforces the overdetermination of this so-called "histoire d'une fille"; the narrative trajectory, in this reading, travels from girl to whore while semantically standing still (*fille* to *fille*). The emphasis on vision in Huysmans's trenchant declaration is seemingly motivated by the same latent concerns that governed the outward appearance of the *maison de tolérance*: of primary importance was its impenetrability to the susceptible gaze of virtuous girls, who might (like Marthe) be lost if they were to catch sight of working "girls" or *filles*. In fact, the narrative tells us, undermining the authority of its proverbial musing, the danger for Marthe is not in *seeing* "d'autres filles" but rather in *bearing* them as they tell stories of their amorous liaisons.

passage into prostitution in a provincial brothel. Though the novel's initial pages are filled with the frenetic debauchery of Élisabeth's Parisian adolescence, it is only when she leaves the capital that her body becomes symbolically imbued with the disorder of her native milieu. The distancing gesture, permutations of which recur throughout the novel, suggests that the bewildering stimuli of the capital can only be textually tamed and consolidated from outside the city limits, from a position of narrative authority only accessible at a remove from urban circulation: to recall Goncourt's own formulation, from a secure (and here, paradoxically exterior) house where the "circulation d'esprits nerveux" cannot seep in through a door that is always unable to shelter the subject from the city's relentless presence. By removing Élisabeth from the disorienting streets of la Chapelle and domesticating her in the distant "douceur relative" of the *maison de tolérance* in Bourlemont, the novel is able to bring Élisabeth to prostitution and crown her "la Parisienne": "Élisabeth devenait la femme, dont à l'oreille et en rougissant se parlaient les jeunes gens de la ville, la femme baptisée du nom de la *parisienne*, la femme désirée entre toutes, la femme convoitée par la vanité des sens provinciaux" (128, 125). Unlike Huysmans, who locates his prostitutional *coin désolé* from within Paris, Goncourt relies on detachment and the lethargic rhythm of the countryside to define Élisabeth; the "hâte brutale condamnée par l'activité de la vie des capitales" is absent in the provinces, allowing the narrator to synthetically affirm Élisabeth's presence by confining her to a house of tolerance.

The initial "inscription" of Marthe and Élisabeth into non-clandestine brothel prostitution is thus triply delimiting: temporally (the analeptic novelistic inscription, recounted in retrospect as historical fact), spatially (the confinement to the *maison de tolérance's* interior), and identitarily (the official status of the prostitute does not disappear upon exiting the brothel except in rare cases of *radiation*). To inscribe the *fille de maison* in text, moreover, is to couch an already stratified system of gazes in further, and potentially complicit, layers of observation: that of the narrator and the reader. When one level of discipline fails, then, the narrative retains a stopgap semblance of control over the

prostitute's body, which has been legally absorbed under the sign of "fille inscrite." "Enfermer pour observer, observer pour connaître, connaître pour surveiller et tenir en son pouvoir, tel se dessine le projet de l'auteur": Alain Corbin's words, though deployed in summation of Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet's reglementarist project, might just as well refer to these naturalist novels devoted to *la prostitution non-clandestine*.⁵⁹ For the naturalist author, the inscribed prostitute is a ready-made *document humain* whose theoretical traceability allows the narrator to remap her body and orient the narrative.

Unhomely Houses (of Ill Repute)

As its real-world counterpart had for moral authorities throughout the nineteenth century, the novelistic *maison de tolérance* channels and regulates a type of prostitutional disorder perceived as necessary for functional operation: here, the creation and flow of narrative, as the protagonists' crossings into and out of the brothel effectuate an equilibrium between plot generation and authorial control. For while Marthe's and Élixa's inscription in the *maison de tolérance* (itself inscribed in text) founds an authorial *lieu propre* by enclosing the prostitute's body and impeding her mobility from diverting the plot into the modern city's illegible exterior, the confinement to the *tolérance* also impedes narrative progression; the sealed interior of the space, impervious to sustained observation, renders ineffectual the authorial position it helps to establish. As Sharon Marcus affirms in a persuasive analysis of Zola's apartment novel *Pot-Bouille*, complete interiorization and naturalist representation are at cross-purposes, since unbreached interiority leads to "a novel with no story to tell."⁶⁰ In naturalist narrative, in other words, seeing precedes telling, and yet seeing inside the *maison de tolérance* requires adopting an observational posture that compromises both the narrator (who must align with the *fille*, the client, the *tenancière*, or the moral authorities to gain entry) and the

⁵⁹ Corbin, *Filles*, 34. On Parent-Duchâtelet, see Introduction.

⁶⁰ Marcus, *Apartment Stories*, 198.

efficacy of the *tolérance*'s enclosure and security. What can be depicted of *maison* life is monotonous, its very regularity and lawful compliance stifling the conventional prostitutional "deviance" and "detours" that are productive of plot and that would seem to be the antidote to the banality of the Haussmannian *ligne droite*.⁶¹ To generate story, and to bind and surmount the *maison* interior's troublesome resistance to naturalist representation, the novels must eventually take to, or take in, the streets – more fertile and observable (if otherly estranging) narrative grounds. The diegetic progression of both novels thus operates through a multiplication of spatial transactions that convey the prostitute's body bidirectionally across the *maison*'s threshold, as the fate of the narrative – and of authorial mastery of both story and city – comes to depend on the narrator's ability to monitor and moderate the movement of its protagonist.

In *La Fille Élisa*, this requires first conveying Élisa, once securely taxonomized as a *fille inscrite* and "la Parisienne," back to her native Paris, as the slow pace and nostalgic idyll of the provincial *maison close* are incompatible with both Élisa's temperament and Goncourt's disciplinary project, his "sévère monographie de la prostituée *non-clandestine*." Before departing from Bourlemont, the novel establishes the reader's expectations for the aesthetic and moral conditions of Parisian prostitution; like Élisa herself, the capital's activity can only be synthesized in contradistinction to the provinces. In stark contrast to the provincial *tolérance*'s measured pace and mom-and-pop atmosphere, the narrator warns us, the Parisian *mauvais lieu* is marked by the shock of anonymous bodies colliding in a passing moment: "La prostitution! D'ordinaire, à Paris, c'est la montée au hasard, par une ivresse, d'un escalier bâillant dans la nuit, le passage furieux et sans retour d'un prurit à travers la mauvaise maison, le contact colère, comme dans un viol, de deux corps qui ne se retrouveront jamais" (81).⁶²

⁶¹ I am thinking here of Peter Brooks's analysis of prostitutional narrative in *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), especially 154-159.

⁶² T.J. Clark likewise notes the particularly urban temporality of Goncourt's description. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, 107.

Parisian prostitution, like the incompletely modernized city itself, is here characterized by a progressive divestment of duration, bringing bodies together in a fleeting jolt of violating contact only to estrange them and efface the traces of the encounters it engenders. The syntactic aggression of Goncourt's characterization echoes the "éclair" of the Baudelairean *flâneur*'s charged gaze in "À une passante," though here the observer's position is displaced: the narrator is doubly an outsider, a Goncourtian "voyageur" neither located in the city nor participating in the urban transaction, yet somehow implicated in its brutality, its alienation. Goncourt's lament about the faltering structures of a mutating Paris whose "intérieur s'en va" implicitly resurfaces here in reverse, crystallized in the violent impermanence of the prostitutional encounter; the door-less "mauvaise maison" (the "bad house," but also the "wrong house" – the house that is not one) with its open staircase cannot contain the stimuli to which it thus subjects the narrator who watches it from outside its walls.

Curiously, given this context, Élixa's departure from the provincial *maison de tolérance* announces a romantic adventure plot, a sentimental detour that both defers the thematic materialization of the punctuated corporeal violence the reader has been led to expect in the city and displaces it onto the suddenly (and increasingly) spasmodic form of the narrative itself. Spurred on by an unhealthy diet of bad romance novels that turns her into an ersatz Emma Bovary "mordue du désir d'accomplir des actions se rapprochant de celles qu'elle avait lues," Élixa briefly adopts the role of a protagonist of another genre, developing a crush on a *commis-voyageur*-cum-secret agent working to overthrow the government and following him (or more accurately, preceding him, as she shows up in each destination city before his arrival) around the country (135).⁶³ After a snippet of sketchily narrated plot of political trickery and bad behavior on the part of the *commis*, Élixa returns to Paris

⁶³ On Élixa's *bovarysme*, see Eléonore Reverzy, "Élixa Bovary. Portrait de la prostituée en lectrice," *Cahiers Edmond et Jules de Goncourt* 16 (2009): 21–31. For an overview of representations of prostitutes reading in the fin-de-siècle novel, including *La Fille Élixa*, see Noëlle Benhamou, "La Prostituée et le livre: fonctions du livre dans quelques romans de filles (1875-1905)," *Texte* 31/32 (2002): 167–182.

and to prostitution (“semblable à toutes les prostituées”) upon discovering that her hero is in fact a *mouchard* (138). For the space of three paragraphs, the narrative excursion plunges Élisabeth into what the text terms “une existence nomade,” the “vie voyageuse et ambulante” one might expect in an *histoire de fille* – ironically, during Élisabeth’s only hiatus from prostitution, though “l’ambulante” was a functional synonym for “prostituée” in the fin-de-siècle vernacular – before confining her to what will prove to be a series of increasingly leaky *maisons* in Paris (137). The bizarre interlude, inspired by an episode recounted in a journal entry from 1855, drives Élisabeth back to the capital with nowhere else to go and a chip on her shoulder, “quelque chose de haineux et de mauvais contre l’autre sexe” that will plausibly motivate the intrigue to come (138).⁶⁴

The forward thrust promised by Élisabeth’s departure from the provinces proves to be a false start, a short-lived diegetic acceleration that is immediately countered by a return to the static rigor of the *maison de tolérance*. The first Parisian brothel where Élisabeth does a stint as a *pensionnaire* is depicted as a sexless “*poulailler*”: a generic *maison de bas étage* meant to evoke, as Goncourt describes in his preparatory *Carnet*, “cet ennui brouillardieux d’une créature qui a toujours besoin d’excitation, de ressort, l’affaissement produit par un ciel bas et l’air comprimé” (139).⁶⁵ Again adjourning the aggressive encounters and evanescent temporality the reader has been led to anticipate in Paris, the short chapter devoted to the brothel’s interior is a somnolent still life of “cette nuit du jour,” of the anesthetic “durée des heures lentes” of the confined prostitute’s everyday routine: a subdued game of cards (appropriately, “une *patience*”), silent embroidery by the meager light of a shuttered window, bored women laying about in various states of undress (*ibid.*). Neutralizing the house’s erotic charge

⁶⁴ As Baguley reports, the scene has a basis in a story noted in Goncourt’s *Journal* on July 19, 1855: “Femme de bordel, éprise d’un commis-voyageur. Quand il la quitte, va demander à son hôtel où il va. C’était à Saint-Omer. Le soir même, il la rencontre raccrochant sur la place. Elle lui tape sur l’épaule. Et ainsi de suite, dans les villes où il va.” Goncourt, *Œuvres complètes, t.VIII: La fille Elisa*, 136n56.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 241. Emphasis original. The term refers to the holding room where the girls bide their time as they wait for work to begin, which *Elisa* specifies is used in the daytime as a result of the *tenancière*’s wishes to ensure no harm befalls the velvet cushions of the *salon de choix*, where the girls wait for clients at night.

by entering the *tolérance* by day instead of by night (“en ces quartiers où l’Amour ne vient guère en visite que le soir”), Goncourt provisionally secures a place in Paris by establishing a locus of selective interiority (ibid.). Sheltered from the city’s unsettling flows by the brothel’s buffering walls, and yet potentially compromised by contact with the prostitutional disorder within, the narrator must strike an interstitial pose of interior exteriority: assuming the distant gaze of the naturalist *greffier* by divesting Élisabeth of her named presence – relegating his unruly heroine to the background in favor of obedient portraits of anonymous whores – and thus circumscribing the desexualized scene with the familiar authority of compliant, carefully assembled *documents humains* (ibid.). The inert tableau is apprehensible through the lens of research pulled from the likes of Parent-Duchâtelet and Lecour, allowing the narrator to affirm his mastery of the Parisian *canaille* with insider details (punctuated by italicized terms from the urban vernacular, whose typographical othering reinforces the narrator’s journalistic distance from the *canaille* itself) and an authoritative assertion at the chapter’s close that “[c]es journées étaient les journées de la nouvelle existence parisienne d’Élisabeth” (140). That the brothel itself lacks both a proper name (known only by its *gros numéro*, 17) and a defined location (the number is unhinged from any name that would give it meaning) makes it even more amenable to narratorial appropriation: a floating Parisian ‘house’ that Goncourt can make into a localizing urban home, a structure capable of arresting the flight of a fading city by domesticating it within its walls.

Goncourt’s wariness about the permeability of the “mauvaise maison” reemerges, however, as the hazy languor of the brothel’s *attente* gives way to the capital’s feverish “circulation d’esprits nerveux.” As the clock strikes three and the hairdresser (“le *merlan*”) enters to ready the girls for the night’s work, the city seeps in to the hermetic narrative “retraite.” Eager for conversation, or indeed any discursive input that will rupture the brothel’s diurnal boredom, the *pensionnaires* gather around “l’artiste capillaire”: “toutes appelant ses réponses en même temps, lui arrachant de la bouche ce qui se passe, ce qui se dit, ce qu’il a vu, le pressent enfin de parler, sans qu’il ait rien à dire, avides, dans

cet enfermement grisâtre, d'entendre quelqu'un leur apportant quelque chose du dehors, de la rue, du Paris vivant et ensoleillé" (140). "Le *merlan*" is a walking metaphor, transporting the city's discursive circulation over the threshold into the brothel's dormant interior.⁶⁶ The *maison*'s textually tamed whores come to life in the presence of "Paris" as if by the flip of a switch, disrupting the scene's measured progression by clamoring for authentic snippets of story from the city swirling outside. In a flash of "contact colère," the homely familiarity of the Goncourtian house of tolerance, whose disciplinary boundaries are protectively papered in *documents humains*, yields to an unhomely intrusion of the new urban exterior in the form of one of those *documents*, the *merlan*. This irruption of the strange in the province of the familiar – of "Paris vivant" in what is by implication "Paris mort" (here positively valenced, as a more permanent iteration of the Goncourtian "Paris [qui] s'en va") – is a subtle materialization of the Freudian uncanny, a phenomenon that, as Nicholas Royle has observed, "entails a critical disturbance of what is proper."⁶⁷ That Éliisa's name finally resurfaces as the chapter's last word, emerging from the generic assembly of textbook brothel whores as the hairdresser leaves and the clients are about to arrive, reminds us of both her complicity with the modernizing city's agitation and the disquieting presence of her imperfectly domesticated body, which symbolically erodes the stability of the narrator's *lieu propre* in reappropriating its proper name.

The onset of the next chapter thus brings *Éliisa* to a decisive impasse. With the defamiliarizing intrusion of story, of the "Paris vivant" that brings Éliisa back into focus, the brothel ceases to be a tenable locus for the narrator; and yet, for the *maison*'s story-starved residents (as for the novel's story-starved readers), the hermetic *tolérance*'s "temps long" and "obscurité" render it a dead space reminiscent of "l'heure plus longue" of the provincial brothel – that is to say, an

⁶⁶ Baguley provides the definition of *merlan* from Alfred Delvau's *Dictionnaire de la langue verte*: "Coiffeur, – dans l'argot du peuple, qui emploie cette expression depuis l'invention de la poudre à poudrer, parce qu'alors les perruquiers étaient toujours enfarinés comme prêts à mettre en la poêle à frire." Ibid., 140n58. This acceptance of *merlan* is also attested in Littré.

⁶⁷ Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 1.

intolerable narrative void. As day turns to night and “se lève le jour de la prostitution,” the text seems to opt for nocturnal intrigue at the expense of the dwelling’s security, pronouncing that “[l]e moment était venu” – a turn of phrase suggesting imminent action, the impending passage over some symbolic threshold (in the context of the *tolérance*, leading either into the bedroom or out the front door) (140). When Éliisa dresses up in “la triste et neutre toilette du vice pauvre” and takes to the streets, however, the only action that ensues is another plotless diversion, a non-event that divests the “moment” of its punctual efficacy under a swarm of repetitive gestures recounted in the imperfect tense (ibid.). Unable to sustain the naturalist’s breed of narrative mastery when both the brothel’s legibility and its interiority are compromised by the uncanny incursion of the city’s narrative agitation, Goncourt enlists the capital’s exterior as a partner in his project of urban emplacement, allowing Éliisa outside only to “faire son heure” in streets that become virtually coextensive with and bolster the *maison*’s faltering walls:

Elle allait, revenait sur le trottoir, marchant vite et retroussée haut, la tête tournant à droite, à gauche, en arrière, à tout bruit de bottes sur le pavé [...] Éliisa allait, revenait sur le trottoir, tout à la fois provocante et honteuse, tout à la fois hardie et craintive, tout à la fois agressive et peureuse des coups. Cinquante pas, vingt-cinq pas en deçà, vingt-cinq pas au-delà de l’entrée de l’allée: c’était la promenade *réglementaire* d’Éliisa, promenade limitée entre la maison portant le n° 17 et un terrain vague. [...] Éliisa recommençait. avec l’ennui irrité de revoir, soixante fois dans une heure, les mêmes maisons, les mêmes devantures, les mêmes pierres. (141-142)

One of only two scenes in the novel that follow Éliisa out into the city after her return from Bourlemont,⁶⁸ the passage displaces the rhythmic *va-et-vient* of sex onto Éliisa’s sidewalk pacing in front of the alleyway where the *maison de tolérance* is tucked away. As in *Marthe*, where Marthe and her fellow *filles de maison* are metaphorized as a “régiment des mercenaires,” the tightly bounded space makes of Éliisa a regimentarist soldier whose obedient march neutralizes the seductive charge of her

⁶⁸ The other, as we shall see, is her excursion from the brothel on the Avenue de Suffren with Tanchon, recounted retrospectively and leading her directly to the *maison de détention* (via the bois de Boulogne on the city’s outskirts).

exposed white stockings and swaying hips. She is semantically shamed for being provocative, her every action countered by its textual suppression and her steps discursively silenced by the narrative dead end of the delimited cyclical *promenade*. Unlike the typical streetwalker who “fait le trottoir,” Éliisa is dispossessed of her spatial agency in this exterior avatar of the *maison de tolérance*; she “stands forth” but goes nowhere, geographically or diegetically, left to bide her time (“faire son *heure*,” “battre son *quart*”) under the narrator’s watch.⁶⁹

It bears emphasizing that the confinement of Éliisa to this interstitial itinerary engages the disciplinary mechanisms of official prostitution in order to keep the protagonist in line. The gesture is reminiscent of a journal entry from 1875, in which Goncourt reflects on his preparatory research for *La Fille Éliisa*: “On ne saura jamais, avec notre timidité naturelle, notre malaise au milieu de la plèbe, notre horreur de la canaille, combien le vilain et laid document, avec lequel nous avons construit nos livres, nous a coûté. Ce métier d’agent de police consciencieux du roman populaire est bien le plus abominable métier que puisse faire un homme d’essence aristocratique.”⁷⁰ Goncourt’s uneasy alignment with the municipal authorities further cements the connection we have been tracing between naturalist narration and prostitutional inscription: in collecting and inscribing authentic prostitutional *documents humains*, the naturalist author assumes the posture of (or is at least complicit with) reglementarist authorities. Standing in for the *agents des mœurs* who patrol the streets ready to put any errant whores *en carte*, Goncourt keeps Éliisa on the textual map with the *greffier*’s surveillant gaze, suppressing the protagonist’s perceived resistance to appropriation and

⁶⁹ According to Alfred Delvau, “battre son quart” means “Raccrocher les passants, le soir à la porte des maisons mal famées, – dans l’argot des filles et de leurs souteneurs.” *Dictionnaire de la langue verte*, rev.ed. (Paris: C. Marpon & E. Flammarion, 1889), 34. Baguley also records the definition (143n60). I say “stand forth” as a nod to the etymology of the word “prostitution”; for a play on this etymology that explores the relationship between prostitution and art, see Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute*, 1. On the streetwalking prostitute, see Chapter Four of this study.

⁷⁰ Edmond et Jules de Goncourt, *Journal* t.II, 1864-1878, ed. A. Ricatte (Paris: Flammarion, 1959).

reestablishing narrative authority over her body with a definitive “[l]a voici” – and by implication, a makeshift authorial emplacement, a contingent “me voici” (141).

Even this consolidated and doubly authorial presence, however, proves susceptible to the disorienting divagations of a wayward Paris(ienne). As the narrator’s cadenced account of the routine sights and steps of Élixa’s *promenade réglementaire* comes to a close, the earlier encroachment of the city’s strangeness into the narrative *lieu propre* recurs in a new (but oddly familiar) place:

L’une après l’autre les boutiques s’étaient éteintes, puis fermées; seule la lueur d’un quinquet chez le coiffeur mettait un rayonnement trouble dans les vieux pots de pommade de la devanture, montrant, sous un éclairage fantastique, deux petits bustes. [...] Ainsi que les choses lumineuses dans l’obscurité prennent, forcent le regard, les deux petits bustes, chaque fois que passait devant eux Élixa, arrêtaient la promeneuse et la retenaient de longs instants [...] [S]es yeux, sans la conscience de ce qu’ils regardaient, contemplaient stupidement les deux poupées macabres. (142)

The coiffeur’s reappearance *in absentia* heralds a more overtly uncanny return to an already uncanny emergence, here signaled by the two “poupées macabres” that attract Élixa’s stupefied attention.⁷¹ What seemed to be merely a noisy diversion in Goncourt’s brothel tableau acquires a more sinister charge as it resurfaces (quite literally brought to light, by the shop’s oil lamp) in this delimited Parisian *parcours*, inverting the dynamics of intrusion that earlier allowed for narrative perception of the *merlan*’s “Paris vivant” as other – and by extension, of the author’s “Paris mort” as *propre*. It is not the *coiffeur* who is out of place, that is, but rather the Goncourtian narrator, “étranger à ce qui vient” as the brothel’s day turns to night and now, in the gas-lit streets of Paris, “étranger [...] à ce qui est.” Significantly, Élixa’s reglementary promenade, like the brothel scene that precedes it, occupies a hybrid space of temporal dissociation, that of Haussmannian Paris: both the protagonist and the narrator are lodged in the interstice between the *tolérance* and a “terrain vague,” traversing a

⁷¹ Laure Katsaros rightly points out that the macabre dolls are a classic manifestation of the Freudian uncanny: “Élixa ends up behaving like a soulless automaton, whereas the strangely expressive busts cross over from the inanimate to the animate” (“Goncourt’s Dream,” 72).

hodgepodge sidewalk “côtoyant de vieilles bâtisses ressoudées tant bien que mal, interrompu par les rentrants des maisons bâties d’après le nouvel alignement” (141). The uncanny display of the hairdressers’ busts – as well as their physical dissimilarity, suggestive of two disparate elements built on the same foundation but irreconcilable to a coherent whole – brings to light a driving force behind the scene’s repetitions and revisitations: the mastery of a “temps en construction,” of Goncourt’s familiar feeling of strangeness in an irreducibly dual space that both is and is no longer his (“Notre Paris”). As reflective, perhaps, of Goncourtian paranoia as of Éliisa’s (nonetheless notable) propensity for fits of stupor, the disarticulated male doll heads troublingly project both the prostitute’s unruly resistance to univocal identity and the commensurate dislocation of the narrator who looks to her to locate himself. It is unsurprising, then, that the text moves swiftly to bring the punctual jolt of the “éclairage fantastique,” stylistically and thematically at odds with the humdrum rigor of Éliisa’s monitored stroll, back into line: first, through the normalizing use of the imperfect tense, which divests the moment of its strangeness by rendering it reiterative and quotidian; and then more aggressively, by returning Éliisa to the *maison de tolérance* when her hour is up, where the *tenancière* (known only as “Madame”) soon fines her for an infraction of house rules. That the violation in question is Éliisa’s failure to wear her corset – her evasion of the literal ties that would bind her, of the rigid container that would give form to her fluid body – suggests that this *fille de maison* is being punished for her resistance to narrative domestication. With the defensive return to the brothel’s interior and the narrator’s conferral of disciplinary authority back to the *tenancière*, Éliisa’s Parisian story comes full circle, having (for the moment) gone nowhere but back to a place that earlier proved both unproductive and untenable.

The remaining pages devoted to Éliisa’s Parisian prostitution are marked by a labored oscillation between the forward movement occasioned by the protagonist’s resistance to quiescent domestication and the text’s reiteration of its classificatory authority over the prostitute’s body and

space, which would have her turning in circles under the roof of the *maison close*. Though the *tenancière*'s decision to put the protagonist "à l'amende" is a technique of containment, it is also the vehicle for yet another incursion of urban circulation into Goncourt's protective interior, one that again occasions a departure from the brothel: the exchange of money. Initiating a series of displacements that adopt the feverish pace of financial circulation and hasten the protagonist's impending *dénouement*, Madame's economic (*oikos/nomos*, "house law") discipline – the only money shown to change hands in the brothel in either novel – both impels the recalcitrant Élisà to leave the *maison* "17" and prevents her from leaving brothel prostitution altogether. In his complicity with the *tenancière*, Goncourt's narrator serves as the unwitting conduit for the introduction of the city's exterior into the hermetic *maison*. When Élisà packs her bags and steps into the city of her own volition, still *inscrite* but no longer subjected to the repetitive pacing of her sidewalk *heure*, the narrator does not follow the flight he has implicitly occasioned, instead hurriedly shuttling her into another *maison de tolérance* in a spatial transaction mediated by an economic one: the transfer of the debts Élisà has incurred from one house to another. As if reluctant to abandon control of the protagonist to the plot-producing unpredictability of the city streets, *Élisà* progresses through an asyndetic logic of juxtaposition and accumulation mediated by brothel economics, unfolding not by following the transitional itinerary of the prostitute's mobile body (the Certalian *parcours* through spaces [*espaces*] formed by the "practice" of places [*lieux*]), but rather through the disjunctive reiteration of *maisons de tolérance* (Certeau's *carte*), an unlinked chain of brothel transfers that rarely sees Élisà set foot outside into the urban space.⁷² As Élisà moves from brothel to brothel, the rapid accumulation of houses, transactions, and locations forces the narrator to have recourse to a book

⁷² Michel de Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien*, 175.

(another manifestation of Simmelian reserve), again unable to observe her frenetic mobility directly without the shield of textuality, the impersonal *document humain*.⁷³

Pendant l'espace d'un petit nombre d'années, Éliisa faisait ainsi les maisons des rues qu'un ancien livre nomme 'des rues chaudes', les maisons de la rue Bourbon-Villeneuve, de la rue Notre-Dame de Recouvrance, de la rue de la Lune, du passage du Caire, de la rue des Filles-Dieu, de la rue du Petit-Carreau, de la rue Saint-Sauveur, de la rue Marie-Stuart, de la rue François, de la rue Mauconseil, de la rue Pavée-Saint-Sauveur, de la rue Thévenot, puis les maisons de la rue du Chantre, de la rue des Poulies, de la rue de la Sonnerie, de la rue de la Limace; – toutes les obscures et abjectes demeures de ces deux quartiers du cœur industriel de la capitale [...]. (144)

Goncourt's Paris is reduced to a frenetically recorded topography of streets and signs, the names of the "rues chaudes" standing in for the brothels that line them and (again) virtually effacing the protagonist. The irreducible nexus of conflicting and ephemeral threads that compose the interiorless modern city for Goncourt is here made manifest in a chaotic enumeration of streets untethered from any meaningful referent and uninhabited by any (architectural or narrative, spatial or temporal) dwelling. The taxonomic efficacy of Éliisa's inscription in the *maison de tolérance* is undermined by her adherence to a competing system of order, "cette loi qui pousse d'un domicile à un domicile, d'un gîte à un gîte, d'un antre à un antre, d'un lupanar à un lupanar" – a permutation of the prostitutional "contact colère" that threatens the observer's capacity to situate Éliisa and anchor the narrative *lieu propre* on her static, enclosed body (144).⁷⁴ Thus dislocated, the narrator cannot map the tortuous territory of the urban space without recourse to a guidebook – a metatextual gesture that underscores the fragility of a cartographic knowledge of the city founded on its *documents humains*.

⁷³ One of the brothels Éliisa visits is described as "une construction aux plâtres mal essuyés," recalling Goncourt's characterization of his own malaise as that of "un homme qui essuierait des plâtres."

⁷⁴ As David Baguley notes, this type of mobility is a *lieu commun* of prostitutional discourse from Parent-Duchâtelet on through the end of the century; Goncourt's depiction of Éliisa's restlessness likely reflects both his preparatory research and a pervasive paranoia about women's mobility. Goncourt, *Œuvres complètes*, t. VIII: *La fille Éliisa*, 144.

The disjointed and continually reinscribed urban map traced by Éliisa's "existence circulante" is the psychic projection of Goncourt's domestic paranoia: venal "houses" everywhere, but nowhere a secure home (144).⁷⁵ Goncourt's "law" of perpetual homelessness, of endless returns to variations of the same, attests a nostalgic drive to make the strange familiar, to domesticate the self by making the unhomely home (the brothel, Paris) unambiguously homely. As Brooks has argued, "repetition works as a process of binding toward the creation of an energetic constant-state situation which will permit the emergence of mastery and the possibility of postponement" – here, aiming to achieve mastery of Parisian space and time through the deferral of the "nouvel alignement" that earlier encroached upon Éliisa's reglementary walk (141).⁷⁶ That the only passage separating Éliisa's brothel-hopping from her final venal stop in the *maison de l'avenue de Suffren* is a fragmentary portrait of the "type général de la prostituée," painted with shattered syntax and reiterated punctuation (semi-colons, dashes) that never brings us to a full stop, suggests that Éliisa's intractable mobility ("ne permettant [...] que de stationner le temps de s'asseoir sous le même toit") not only threatens to evade textual mastery, but also to contaminate and erode textual form (146). Predicated upon the continual binding of Éliisa's body – and, through it, of the uncanny intrusions that undermine the security of Goncourt's *intérieur* – the narrative *maison* is a refractory and incompletely recuperated *lieu*

⁷⁵ Goncourt's account of Éliisa's displacements is redolent of a famous prostitutional anecdote from Freud's 1919 essay "The Uncanny":

As I was walking, one hot summer afternoon, through the deserted streets of a provincial town in Italy which was unknown to me, I found myself in a quarter of whose character I could not long remain in doubt. Nothing but painted women were to be seen at the windows of the small houses, and I hastened to leave the narrow street at the next turning. But after having wandered about for a time without enquiring my way, I suddenly found myself back in the same street, where my presence was now beginning to excite attention. I hurried away once more, only to arrive by another *détour* at the same place yet a third time. Now, however, a feeling overcame me which I can only describe as uncanny, and I was glad enough to find myself back at the piazza I had left a short while before, without any further voyages of discovery. [Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 17 (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 237]

⁷⁶ Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 101.

propre, resistant to static incorporation and contingent on the willful displacement of the narrator's ever-present *étrangeté* out of the *tolérance* and onto the city itself.

Marthe likewise makes the *maison de tolérance* the fulcrum of a supple narrative equilibrium, establishing the brothel's walls as an instrument of emplacement but struggling to master its interior. Both the orientation of *Marthe's* itinerary and Huysmans's positioning with respect to his protagonist, however, are distinctive – a disjuncture, reflective of divergent conceptions of the authorial urban dwelling, that will become more significant as the novels progress (and to which we will return later in the chapter). Unlike *Élisa's*, then, *Marthe's* first description of brothel life collides head-on with the alienation that lies in wait within its localizing walls, as Huysmans brazenly enters the *maison de tolérance* by the artificial light of night and thus foregoes any potential repression or deferral of the space's uncanny dissociation in favor of its overt disclosure, its “bringing to light.” In our initial (and only direct) glimpse into the Huysmansian “buvette d’amour,” the author makes manifest *Marthe's* subjective void, the breed of estrangement regularized and relegated to the background in *Élisa* by Goncourt's effacement of his protagonist from the brothel's interior. Absent are the chaste, dimly lit portraits of bored *filles* in waiting, along with any real pretention to journalistic distance; Huysmans's narrator is putatively sympathetic to *Marthe's* plight, bemoaning the “abjects labours” and “sinistres fatigues” of the odious “métier de ces malheureuses” and effectively communicating to the reader the “angoisses” and “dégoûts” of brothel prostitution (83).⁷⁷ In the hyperbolically miserable space of “cette geôle infrangible,” *Marthe* is frozen into inaction, as life in the brothel quickly devolves into an abject muddle of atmospheric overstimulation and affective annihilation: she drinks herself numb (“jusqu’à en mourir”), lies motionless in fear (“gisait [...] éboulée sur un amas de coussins”), grows morally and physically weary (“écœurée et lasse”),

⁷⁷ As Robert Ziegler observes, the narrative temporarily shifts its sympathy to the brothel's clients, whose own “ennuis”, “rancunes”, and “douleurs” *Marthe* “ne comprenait pas” (Huysmans, *Marthe*, 86). In Ziegler, “Feminized Reality/Male Realism,” 193.

looks around in an anesthetic daze (“avec hébètement”) (83-84). In stark contrast to both the homey provincial brothel where Éliisa debuts and its dormant-by-day Parisian counterpart (but nonetheless echoing their narrative unsustainability), the *maison de tolérance* is here rendered as an openly unhomely house of mock pleasures and real misery that Marthe is unable to abide – and that Huysmans is unable to articulate in writing, thus setting the stage for her timely escape from this diegetic vacuum and the ineffable “vie plus effroyable que toutes les géhennes rêvées par les poètes” within (83). The novel’s first pass through the brothel reveals its incandescent irreality to be no more the stuff of narrative than the wretched reality of the urban “bouge” where Marthe loses her child, each extreme replete with its own variety of “inénarrables choses” (79).

Whereas Goncourt preemptively eradicates the generative potential of Éliisa’s mobile body by accompanying her out of the brothel only within the confines of reglemented prostitution, however, Huysmans allows his protagonist to break free of her inscription and move in the streets without explicitly enforced boundaries before bringing her back to the *mauvais lieu*. After turning a blind eye to Marthe’s first venal encounter by shutting “la lourde portière” – much as Goncourt’s narrator elides Éliisa’s initial sexual transaction – the novel follows her escape out the brothel’s locked door the next morning and into the streets of the Left Bank, seemingly acquiescing to her desire to “aller oublier au loin d’inoubliables maux” (87). For an instant, both the reader and the protagonist breathe in the fresh air of spatial liberation and narrative movement as Marthe “march[e] au hasard, ne pensant à rien” (87). The “inoubliables maux” are not long forgotten, however, and the “hasard” is illusory: Marthe’s status as a fugitive *fille soumise* ensures that the surveillant force of the *tenancière*, who rules the brothel with a fearsomely effective (if not physically perceptive) “œil mort,” will continue to structure her displacement after her she crosses the threshold to “s’échapper de l’immonde maison” (87). From the moment she “s’élan[ce] dans la rue,” her freedom is tempered by the risk of being *mise en carte* by the moral police: registered as a *fille isolée* and subsumed under the

permanent sign of *fille publique*. The *tolérance*'s character clings to Marthe, her every step psychically superimposing onto the city streets the projection of the brothel's walls:

Soudain, le sentiment de ses maux la poigna, elle se rappela qu'elle fuyait les saturnales, qu'elle était en rupture de ban, et elle jeta un coup d'œil de bête épeurée autour d'elle.

Elle se trouvait alors dans le bas du boulevard Saint-Michel, lorsque deux sergents de ville descendirent tranquillement vers la Seine. Une indéfinissable angoisse lui serra la gorge, ses jambes fléchirent, il lui sembla que ces hommes allaient l'arrêter et la traîner au poste. Le soleil qui pleuvait en gouttes blondes sur l'asphalte bordée d'arbres lui parut la mettre, seule, en lumière et montrer à tous qui elle était. Elle s'enfuit dans une de ces petites rues sombres qui relient le boulevard à la place Maubert. (87)

Marthe's departure from the brothel, like Élixa's, sets the precedent for a protracted textual game of push-and-pull, of narrative progression and deferral. Her wandering is abruptly curtailed by the realization that her body is still marked by its prostitutional inscription, the sanitized visibility of the Haussmannian boulevard (made manifest by the penetrating light that threatens to betray her identity) complicit with the *sergents de ville* who patrol it. Unlike Goncourt, whose protagonist's compliance with her registered status is never called into question despite her obstinate refusal to stay in place, Huysmans thus initially relies on the fact of Marthe's inscription to keep his *fille* in [the plot]line, maintaining disciplinary control over her spatial and narratological detours and diversions without directly assuming the position of the *police des mœurs*. The vivacious candor of the girl who emerged "plus fraîche et plus affriolante que jamais" from the loss of her child and her lover four pages earlier is here but a distant memory, replaced by a trembling *fille* caught in the panoptic spotlight of the modern boulevard and her locational identity as a registered prostitute. Once outside the brothel, Marthe is out of place (giving a sinister turn to Certeau's declaration that "[m]archer, c'est manquer de lieu"); and yet, the narrator's provisional complicity with the moral authorities ensures that Marthe remains on the map, her displacements phantasmatically bounded by the menace of the *mise en carte*.

Her digressions thus contained, the narrative leads Marthe from the boulevard Saint-Michel into the seedy *bas-fonds* of old Paris that, dating back to Balzac and Sue, are traditionally productive of plot. Thirsty for booze to help her forget her troubles and eager to find shelter from the threat of being *mise en carte*, she slides into the isolated back room of a squalid wine shop for a drink; that even the lurid stare of the *cabaretier* is imbued with disciplinary rigor (Marthe wonders if he suspects “de quel bain elle s’était échappée”) reminds the reader of the narrator’s latent gaze (88). It is here that the novel rejoins its beginning and sets the stage for finally moving beyond the initial scene in the Bobino Theater, as a drunken Ginginet approaches Marthe in the bar and invites her to join his troupe, seduced by her beauty and her “air panné et honteux” (90). It is also here that Marthe’s intermittent nostalgia for the brothel first surfaces:

Comme toutes les malheureuses que la misère et l’embauchage ont traînées dans les clapiers d’une ville, elle éprouvait, malgré elle, malgré l’horrible dégoût qui l’avait assaillie lors de ses premières armes, cet étrange regret, cette maladie terrible qui fait que toute femme qui a vécu de cette vie, retourne s’y plonger un jour ou l’autre. (90)

Marthe’s narrative agency is strictly circumscribed, contained in the interstice between her flight from, and now inevitable return to, the *maison de tolérance*. In order to defer the dénouement – an immediate return to the brothel would, after all, mean the end of the narrative⁷⁸ – the novel must follow Marthe’s agitated march in fits and starts, her mobility restricted by her enclosure in a series of architectural “antidotes” to her prostitutional nostalgia, to “le poison qu’elle avait absorbé” (90). After exercising just enough spatial autonomy to occasion the narratively fortuitous encounter with Ginginet (a type of encounter Goncourt preempts by confining Élisabeth to her official pacing),

⁷⁸ This reading is inspired by Peter Brooks’s chapter “Freud’s Masterplot” in *Reading for the Plot*, 90–112.

Marthe is thus temporarily “sauvée” from both the authorities and prostitutional recidivism by taking to the stage.⁷⁹

Anticipating Bordenave’s “bordel” in Zola’s *Nana*, the Bobino becomes the first of several adjunct *maisons de tolérance*, a temporary public holding cell where the narrator has free access to Marthe’s body but is shielded from her vicissitudes (“[c]ette existence de fièvres et de souleries, de sommeils vaincus, de papotages perpétuels, de va-et-vient, d’entrées, de sorties, de montées, de descentes [...]”) by virtue of their confinement to the stage (90). The earlier depiction of the boulevard Saint-Michel as a pseudo-natural theater – a tree-lined stage with a solar spotlight pointed directly at Marthe, the leading actress suffering from a dire case of stage fright – endows Marthe’s time at the Bobino with an additional layer of signification. The novel accompanies Marthe to overtly theatrical extremes (the sinister clarity of the new boulevard, the potentially engulfing mire of the old *bas-fonds*) before establishing a new narrative center, defined by the confrontation of the Bobino’s raucous disorder with Haussmann’s technocratic order, in the hands of the writer. In bringing Marthe back to the theater only to wrest her from its relative security, in other words, Huysmans transfers authority over her body from the urban planner to the vulgar director to the mediocre writer, from Haussmann to Ginginet to Léo. That it is in the open-access Bobino rather than the hermetic *maison de tolérance* that Léo encounters Marthe is telling; the unmediated brothel is an expressly compromising space for the writer, who (much like Goncourt) will repeatedly struggle with the uneasy intelligibility of the “abominable vie” within.

⁷⁹ Following Huysmans’s own language of poison and cure, Larry Duffy classifies the Bobino as a “pharmakon,” a “simulacrum of the mobility of the prostitute’s lifestyle” (*Le Grand Transit Moderne*, 167). On the play of artifice and reality in *Marthe* and Huysmans’s feminization of the real, see Ziegler, “Feminized Reality/Male Realism.”

Mauvais lieu, Mauvais temps

The formal struggle in both *Marthe* and *La Fille Élisa* with the disorder of the prostitute's mobility is compounded by and conflated with a progressively distorted mapping of the urban space itself. The closed interior of the *maison de tolérance*, the textual "artifice" that allows the author to isolate the prostitute's body and establish a sustainable authorial position, is a narrative dead-end with a propensity for uncanny turns, thereby requiring that these narrators judiciously follow their titular *fille* into the illegible disarray of the partially modernized city in order to write it. For all their naturalist determinacy and exactitude – Huysmans's proclamation that he writes "ce que je vois, ce que je sens et ce que j'ai vécu," and Goncourt's positioning "comme un médecin, comme un savant, comme un historien" in their respective prefaces – both novels betray a subtle but persistent spatiotemporal imprecision as they move from the brothel into the city streets, their locational ambiguity suggestive of an increasingly tenuous hold on their Parisian present.⁸⁰ Standing in for a generation of displaced and/or disoriented Parisians, both Huysmans and Goncourt falter in accurately reading and charting the resistant, deceptive topography of a city where the dissociation between the map and the territory is keenly felt: a space where (in the words of Théophile Gautier) "tel qui croyait connaître son chemin, s'égare dans des voies nées d'hier."⁸¹

Though *Marthe*'s setting is roughly contemporaneous with its time of writing (the novel is loosely based on Huysmans's 1867 affair with an actress from the Bobino), Huysmans's descriptions of the city weave streets past and present into an erratically palimpsestic urban fabric, incorporating old and new in what I read as an effort to "fixer l'insaisissable," to bind and sustain in narrative the arrested map of a writable Paris. Let us now revisit Marthe's initial passage from the brothel to the streets, where the text spatially juxtaposes the new and old city on a diachronic map:

⁸⁰ Huysmans, *Marthe, histoire d'une fille*, 64.; Goncourt, *Œuvres complètes, t.VIII: La fille Elisa*, 97.

⁸¹ Théophile Gautier, "Préface," in *Paris démoli: Mosaïque de ruines*, by Édouard Fournier, 2nd ed. (Paris: Auguste Aubry, 1855), I.

Elle se trouvait alors dans le bas du boulevard Saint-Michel, lorsque deux sergents de ville descendirent tranquillement vers la Seine. [...] Elle s'enfuit dans une de ces petites rues sombres qui relient le boulevard à la place Maubert. Elle se sentait plus à l'aise dans les ténèbres de ces portes qui bâillent sur les trottoirs. (87)⁸²

In crossing from the boulevard Saint-Michel to one of the nameless “petites rues sombres,” it seems, Marthe travels not only in space but in time. The passage sketches the transition-less nature of Paris’s visual landscape, the theatrical transparency of Haussmann’s new boulevard yielding abruptly to a contingent refuge that has escaped demolition by the planner’s hand. The narrator’s tracing of the prostitute’s remobilized itinerary thus brings about a confrontation with the sorts of disconcerting contrasts (the “pronounced differences within what is grasped at a single glance”) that constitute for Simmel the metropolitan threat to identity⁸³ – and that nonetheless, as I have shown, constitute for Huysmans the elusive stuff of urban poetry in a Paris where “[t]out est contraste.”⁸⁴ In a later essay, Huysmans would tellingly characterize this *quartier* of the capital, Saint-Séverin, as “le seul, à Paris, qui conserve encore un peu de l’allure des anciens temps,” which nevertheless “s’effrite et se démolit chaque jour.”⁸⁵ “[D]ans quelques années,” he continues, the legible map of the crumbling quarter will fade, and “il n’y aura plus trace des délicieuses mesures qui l’encombrent. [...] L]’on répétera sur tous les tons que Paris est assaini, et personne ne comprendra que ces changements ont rendu le séjour de la ville intolérable.”⁸⁶ That the “house of tolerance” to which Marthe is confined, first in body and then progressively in memory, is textually located at this

⁸² The last sentence of this passage is omitted in some editions, including the Cogné edition to which the rest of the citations in this chapter refer. It appears in the original 1876 edition published in Belgium by Jean Gay, as well as in Dottin-Orsini and Grojnowski, *Un joli monde*, 19.

⁸³ “The Metropolis and Mental Life” (1903), in *On Individuality and Social Forms* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1971), 324–325.

⁸⁴ Huysmans, “Pages retrouvées,” 20.

⁸⁵ Joris-Karl Huysmans, *La Bièvre et Saint-Séverin* (Paris: P.-V. Stock, 1898), 50, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1022850>. Huysmans grew up in the neighborhood and repeatedly returned to it in his writings. On Huysmans’s life, see Robert Baldick’s still authoritative biography, *The Life of J.-K. Huysmans*.

⁸⁶ Huysmans, *La Bièvre et Saint-Séverin*, 50.

interstice between the “petites rues sombres” and the sweeping, transparent boulevards suggests a narrative striving to isolate the artistically productive disconnect between old and new and extend it into the eternal present of writing, where the “séjour de la ville” (understood here as a city “dwelling,” both architectural and temporal) can potentially be made not only tolerable but sustainable.

A cartographically oriented reading of this passing snapshot of a neighborhood in transition reveals a striking omission. The side streets that provide Marthe’s escape route, which were lined with *maisons closes* at the time (evoked synecdochically in Huysmans’s text by their characteristic “portes qui bâillent”) and thus would likely have been subjected to the very surveillance Marthe seeks to evade, offer a precarious, indirect path to the Place Maubert; there is no single side street that would convey Marthe to her destination without deviation onto other roads. The only direct “petites rues” leading from the boulevard Saint-Michel to Maubert without forcing Marthe to backtrack toward the Seine (and the *sergents de ville* she flees) are the rue du Foin and the rue des Noyers – both of which had already been swallowed up by another Haussmannian “piercing,” the boulevard Saint-Germain, in the novel’s diegetic time. Huysmans himself would return to document the two roads’ disappearance many years later in *Le quartier Saint-Séverin* (1898): “cette voie portait deux noms: – de la rue de la Harpe à la rue Saint-Jacques, rue du Fain ou du Foin; – de la rue Saint-Jacques à la place Maubert, rue des Noyers [...] Le boulevard Saint-Germain se déroule maintenant à la place de ces deux rues.”⁸⁷ In Huysmans’s rendering, the boulevard Saint-Germain, with its unifying, destructive force, merges the dichotomous roads into a univocal “voie,” its unwaveringly linear progression (both in space and in narrative, as the boulevard – like the novel – “se déroule” in the old streets’ place) intolerant of the novelistic detours that lead to plot. In *Marthe*, then, the

⁸⁷ Ibid., 212.

monolithic boulevard is conspicuous in its absence – especially in the context of later writings, where Huysmans would openly lament its presence:

À l'heure qu'il est, les ingénieurs ont démoli les quelques maisons, les quelques sentes qui pouvaient demeurer aimables; tous les coins intimes ont disparu [...] le boulevard Saint-Germain, l'avenue de Messine s'imposent comme le type du Paris moderne; nous ne verrons bientôt plus que des rues rectilignes [...] d'édifices plats et mornes, dont l'aspect dégage un ennui atroce.⁸⁸

Huysmans's textual effacement of the boulevard Saint-Germain leaves what he would later call "le labyrinthe des vieilles rues" ("enserr[é]" by Saint-Germain, the boulevard Saint-Michel, and the Seine) unbounded on one side. It hems Marthe into the maze of hovels and alleys with the discipline of the narrator's gaze, but allows the narrator to linger on the threshold, at a safe remove from her circulating body and thus able to observe her from the margins without getting tangled in the plot twists of the labyrinth within.⁸⁹ Thus extricated, the narrator also avoids being absorbed with the prostitute into the closed system of the "rues rectilignes"; standing at the point of contact between two time zones, so to speak, the narrator "s'excrit" (to borrow Nancy's term) while the fugitive *fille inscrite* remains circumscribed. The dislocation of the boulevard creates, in other words, an illusive "coin intime": a plot, as yet incompletely appropriated by urbanism but nonetheless susceptible ("débile et navr[é]"), that Huysmans can then appropriate in text. Standing in for the "artiste démolisseur," Huysmans plays fast and loose with space and time, carving a chronotopic *chantier* that once again dispossesses this relatively static parcel of land of its finitude. This dual gesture – razing one modern boulevard by omitting it in narrative, while allowing another to stand forth and implicitly valorize the corner it threatens to displace – dislocates the installed order by situating the spatiotemporal disjuncture in narrative, where it seems more contingent (the perceived threat to

⁸⁸ "Chéret," *La Plume*, 15 novembre 1893, quoted in J.-K. Huysmans, *À Paris*, ed. Patrice Locmant (Paris: Bartillat, 2005), 21.

⁸⁹ Huysmans, *La Bièvre et Saint-Séverin*, 65.

these “délicieuses mesures” here exceeds the actual threat, as Haussmann’s demolition work in the area had ended) but is nonetheless subject to authorial control. It represents modern Paris by synchronizing old and new on a deceptive narrative map without reducing the fundamental diachrony to identity. The official oversight of the *maison de tolérance*, a structure designed to maintain social order by containing a so-called “necessary ill,” thus cedes to the narratorial oversight of what we might name the *coin de tolérance*, an exterior “dwelling” that abides Haussmannian urbanism (a Huysmansian necessary ill) but delimits its ambit in order to sustain the fruitful tension of the old city’s labyrinthine resistance to the menacing encroachment of modernity.

Marthe’s crossing from the brothel’s swirl of fake light and glittering (fake) jewels into the sun-drenched theater of Haussmann’s boulevard leaves her “en rupture de ban,” a spatial expression that now (in light of the cartographic play we have traced) acquires a productive polysemy: referring literally to Marthe’s departure from the *maison de tolérance*, which leaves her outside the space to which her inscription has legally confined her, it also ruptures the “ban” that encloses the potential “coin intime” within the flat banality of the boulevards and thus allows for discursive disclosure of the narrative interest within. It symbolically removes this urban *maison close* from the modern city center and locates it *à part*, in the margin or outskirts (the *ban-lieue*). In running away from the brothel, then, Marthe flees toward a new center, reversing the itinerary des Esseintes will follow at the beginning of Huysmans’s “against the grain” narrative *À rebours*. It is at the end of that novel, in fact, when des Esseintes is preparing to leave Fontenay and return definitively to his “appartement encore inoccupé dans une maison neuve” in Paris, that we find the only other appearance of the word “ban” in Huysmans’s fictional works: “Est-ce qu’il ne s’était pas mis lui-même au ban de la société?”⁹⁰ While *Marthe* never leaves the city, unlike the later novel, the narrative’s confinement of

⁹⁰ J.-K Huysmans, *À rebours*, ed. Daniel Grojnowski (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 2004), 242. My claim that these are the only two appearances of “ban” in Huysmans’s fiction results from a search of the digital archives compiled in the

its protagonist to the space of the *maison de tolérance* nonetheless institutes a *ban*, a delimitation that effectively allows the narrator to extricate himself from the prostitutional and Parisian fray while remaining within its limits. Only after the *ban* has been generated by Marthe's initial inscription into the brothel (and thereby been symbolically transferred onto her person) can the narrator erode its urbanistic avatar, the boulevard Saint-Germain, and implicitly establish an alternative cartography founded on the tracing of the prostitute's body. Once Marthe is "en rupture de ban," that is, the author may locate a ready-made, mobile "ban" defined by where her body is not. *Marthe's* narrator thus tentatively carves out a *lieu propre* both demarcated by and separate from the capital, here foretelling of des Esseintes's desire to make his home in a place "retiré assez loin déjà, sur la berge, pour que le flot de Paris ne l'atteignît plus et assez près cependant pour que cette proximité de la capitale le confirmât dans sa solitude."⁹¹ If, as Hollis Clayson has intimated, the prostitute more generally embodies both temporal paradigms of Baudelairean "art" – transitory modernity and immutable timelessness⁹² – the "tolerated" prostitute is a privileged fulcrum for Huysmans's urban poetics of tolerance, a tentative site of resolution to his plaint in the *Croquis* that there is "toujours un Avant et un Après et jamais un Maintenant qui dure!"⁹³ The synchronic equilibrium of the "Maintenant qui dure" – the authorial reterritorialization iteratively reenacted on Marthe's deterritorialized body – remains tenuous, however, achievable only through an anachronistic reconstruction of the present landscape. It is, to adopt Jacques Derrida's formulation, "[u]n maintenant disjoint ou désajusté, 'out of joint,' un maintenant désajointé qui risque toujours de ne rien maintenir ensemble dans la conjonction assurée de quelque contexte dont les bords seraient encore

ARTFL-FRANTEXT database (<http://artfl-project.uchicago.edu.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/node/23>), which contains all his novels.

⁹¹ Ibid., 46.

⁹² Hollis Clayson, *Painted Love: Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2003), 8–9.

⁹³ J.-K. Huysmans, *Croquis parisiens* (Paris: Plon, 1908), 139, <http://archive.org/details/croquisparisien00huys>.

déterminables.”⁹⁴ That des Esseintes’s more intricate separation is ultimately untenable – “Je serai à Paris; allons, fit-il, tout est bien fini” – forewarns us of the difficulty of creating a “coin intime,” a proper place capable of staving off the city’s persistent pull.⁹⁵

Whereas *Marthe* maps the past alongside the present in search of a *coin de tolérance*, a “durable now,” *La Fille Élisa* does so defensively, the modern city’s unyielding circulation necessitating recourse to a retrospective narrative interior. Early in the novel, Élisa’s mother Madame Alexandre loosely establishes the novel’s diegetic time when she reveals that the clients she has visited that day live “dans les baraquements du clos Saint-Lazare, là, vous savez, où il y a eu tant de vieilles maisons démolies...” (108; ellipsis original). In his critical edition of the novel, David Baguley rightly cites this offhanded remark as one of *Élisa*’s few clear temporal markers.⁹⁶ Referring implicitly to Haussmann’s demolition of the city’s old streets and houses around the construction site of the Gare du Nord, it situates the episode from Élisa’s adolescence as dating from the Second Empire, some time in the late 1850s or 1860s.⁹⁷ And indeed, Goncourt’s preparatory documentation for the novel supports this reading. The story Madame Alexandre recounts is based on a story that the Goncourt brothers learned from Jules’s mistress, a midwife named Maria, whose daughter was the model for Élisa; both the preparatory notes in the *Carnet* and the brothers’ *Journal* attest that Maria’s

⁹⁴ Jacques Derrida, *Spectres de Marx* (Paris: Galilée, 1993), 21.

⁹⁵ Huysmans, *À rebours*, 249.

⁹⁶ “Malgré l’absence presque totale de repères historiques dans ce roman, cette allusion à la démolition des vieux quartiers de Paris nous autorise peut-être à situer cet épisode au début du Second Empire, lors des travaux réalisés par le baron Haussmann, préfet de la Seine à partir de 1853, pour l’embellissement et l’assainissement de la capitale.” Goncourt, *Œuvres complètes, t.VIII: La fille Élisa*. Baguley also notes in the “Introduction” to the same volume that naturalist novels display “une précision topographique qui s’oppose à l’imprécision habituelle de la datation de son action” (64). This imprecise dating seems to merit future study, as chronological confusion would seem to trouble naturalist mastery; one might think of Zola’s defensive retorts in response to accusations of his anachronism in the panoramic tableaux of *Une page d’amour*, for example.

⁹⁷ While I concur with Katherine Ashley that “the mimetic representation of the Goncourts’ immediate environment of Second Empire Paris predominates” in *La Fille Élisa*, I disagree with the contention that it “is the only one of Edmond’s solo novels to be placed in an unambiguous historical moment, and the only one in which this really matters”; to my mind, the temporality of *La Fille Élisa* is far from “unambiguous.” *Edmond de Goncourt and the Novel: Naturalism and Decadence* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 75, 79.

visit to the *clos Saint-Lazare* takes place in May 1868.⁹⁸ Late in the novel, the narrator reaffirms this temporal frame, mentioning in a direct intervention that his knowledge of the sentimental dynamics between prostitutes and soldiers is based on authentic documents: “[d]ans la démolition de la Cité, un paquet de lettres, trouvé dans les décombres, me fut apporté” (162). The *maisons de tolérance* that lined the streets of la Cité, one of the old *quartiers chauds*, were again only destroyed by Haussmann’s workers, which would seem to confirm that the novel takes place during the Second Empire.⁹⁹

There is a chronological inconsistency here, however. In the citational list of “rues chaudes” we studied earlier, the narrator mentions that Éliśa’s successive stops in Parisian brothels hit all the major streets of the main districts of tolerated prostitution (“le quatrième et le sixième lot de la prostitution non clandestine de Paris”), “il y a une trentaine d’années.”¹⁰⁰ If we are to understand this as an implication that Éliśa’s brothel-hopping was coterminous with the cited book’s frame of reference, and if Goncourt’s narrator, explicitly identified as Goncourt himself in the novel’s last chapter, is ostensibly recounting Éliśa’s story from around the time of publication, then Éliśa’s short stays in these *tolérances* “thirty years earlier” could have happened no later than the late 1840s.¹⁰¹ This timeline would necessarily make the scene from Éliśa’s adolescence that refers to the ongoing destruction of *maisons* around Saint-Lazare out of joint, locating it in the early 1840s, or more than a

⁹⁸ Robert Ricatte, *La genèse de La fille Elisa* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1960), 17. Here and elsewhere, Ricatte’s book provides invaluable, painstakingly researched information about the sources and genesis of Edmond de Goncourt’s first solo novel.

⁹⁹ As Corbin notes, “les bouleversements opérés dans le centre de la capitale ont déjà entraîné la disparition de certains hauts lieux de l’amour vénal: c’est ainsi que la Cité, et du même coup l’île Saint-Louis, centre du Paris prostitutionnel depuis l’époque médiévale, s’étaient trouvées ‘assainies’ par les travaux d’Haussmann.” *Les filles de noce*, 88. On the brothel letters as a source for the novel, see Ricatte, *La genèse de La fille Elisa*, 69–73.

¹⁰⁰ In his 1891 monograph *Paris-impur*, journalist and lexicographer Charles Virmaître explains that “[u]ne division par lots a été instituée, Paris est fractionné en dix lots, la banlieue en constitue un seul.” *Paris-impur* (Paris: C. Dalou, 1889), 226. Modern historian Jill Harsin specifies that a “lot” was a group of prostitutes that were subject to the surveillance of one moral officer. Jill Harsin, *Policing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century Paris* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1985), 212–13.

¹⁰¹ Mireille Dottin-Orsini notes that this episode situates the diegesis prior to 1850 but does not comment on the temporal disjoint between this and other historical markers in the novel. Dottin-Orsini and Grojnowski, *Un joli monde*, 60.

decade before the onset of Haussmannian demolition. If, on the other hand, Goncourt is merely recurring to an old book to ground *Élisa*'s displacements in documentary authority, without implying that they actually took place thirty years earlier, the scene is no less indicative of a grafting of the past onto the present, the “untimely” perplexity of Haussmannization resurfacing in the Goncourtian inscription of anachronistic *documents humains*.¹⁰² The ambiguous mapping deployed in both *Marthe* and *Élisa* would seem to reveal a hole in the fabric of the naturalist plot, an emergent crack in the observational apparatus that would record “ce qui est” in narrative; here again, the deictic “ce” refuses to be pinned to a univocal (and unitemporal) antecedent.

Detaining Disorder

Echoing Andreas Huyssen's assertion that “the urban imaginary in its temporal reach may well put different things in one place: memories of what there was before, imagined alternatives to what there is,” Huysmans and Goncourt each map an asynchronic Parisian landscape, a novelistic territory where space and time are “out of joint.” Though the discrepancies woven into the fabric of the novels' documentary detailing of the Parisian space are imperceptibly subtle to the unattuned reader (as they likely were to the authors themselves), the deliberate and explicit classification of *Marthe* and *Élisa* as “naturalist” works brings to light the *étrangeté* of their equivocal cartographies.¹⁰³ In a reprisal of Flaubertian brothel dynamics, the fin-de-siècle *maison de tolérance* is the site of this chronotopic disarticulation, a fluid nexus for the taxonomic categories at work in these novels:

¹⁰² Here we should note that Parent-Duchâtelet, one of two primary prostitutional sources for Goncourt (and the point of reference for countless novelists throughout the nineteenth century), wrote his seminal treatise in the 1830s (it was published posthumously in 1836).

¹⁰³ In another instance of slippery defamiliarization, the very details and documents that authorize these narratives by attesting to their accurate portrayal of the matter at hand undermine that authority from within: Huysmans's intimately familiar childhood home is the site of his imaginative recreation of the Parisian map; Goncourt's arduously collected *documents humains*, the brothel letters and the “code de la prosti[tution]” that furnishes the toponymic enumeration of *Élisa*'s “rues chaudes,” are mutually contradictory.

familiarity and strangeness, the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich*, order and disorder, old and new Paris. Juxtaposing here and there, now and then (in other words, taking over where Flaubert's *ça* and *là* left off), the out-of-place *maison* houses both a resurgence of the familiar (the brothel prostitute, old Paris) in the heart of the new ("clandestine" prostitution, Haussmannized Paris), and an eruption of strangeness (unreal cartographies, urban circulation) within the confines of the familiar (naturalist narrative, the *maison* itself). If, in both *Marthe* and *Élisa*, the *maison de tolérance* actualizes Paris as (to reappropriate Goncourt's phrase that served as an epigraph to this chapter) a "bordel de l'étranger," the novels nonetheless domesticate the brothel's "strangeness" or "foreignness" to distinct ends: Goncourt recuperating "what was there before" as a protective reserve against the circulation of the present, and Huysmans bringing to light the disjunctive flows that constitute the urban "maintenant." This final section of the chapter will consider the brothel's place in these novels as both a privileged object and instrument of synchronic nostalgia and itself a space resistant to mastery, delineating what I read as divergent approaches to resolving the city's unhomeliness and to writing the *ville-chantier*: Goncourt's strategic *détention*, and Huysmans's aforementioned tactics of *tolérance*.

As we might have intuited from our reading of Flaubert's shifty *maison close*, and from the emergence of the uncanny in both novels' *maisons de tolérance*, the brothel has a proclivity for spatiotemporal alterity that extends well beyond the context of nineteenth-century French *réglementarisme*. In a 1967 lecture entitled "Des espaces autres," Michel Foucault cites "ces fameuses maisons closes dont on se trouve maintenant privée" as an "extreme" example of a heterotopia, an "other" space characterized by an ability to "juxtaposer en un seul lieu réel plusieurs espaces, plusieurs emplacements qui sont en eux-mêmes incompatibles."¹⁰⁴ Appropriating a medical term referring to the displacement of body parts from their normal position, Foucault conceives of the

¹⁰⁴ Michel Foucault, "Des espaces autres," in *Dits et écrits IV (1980-1988)* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 1577.

heterotopia as a countersite, a real-world materialization of utopia by means of which everyday spaces may be represented, contested, and/or inverted. Constituted by a fundamental “incongruity [that] emerges through a relationship of difference with other sites,” Kevin Hetherington has clarified, heterotopia are “spaces of alternate ordering” that “have the effect of making things appear out of place,” either by “unsettling [...] spatial relations” or replacing them with an alternative paradigm.¹⁰⁵ Finally, and significantly, Foucault shows heterotopia to be affiliated with temporal “découpages” or “hétérochronies,” only fully actualizing their function when “les hommes se trouvent dans une sorte de rupture absolue avec leur temps traditionnel.”¹⁰⁶ Conceived as a heterotopia, the tolerated brothel institutes yet another *ban*: in addition to putting the prostitute *en carte* and thus demarcating an authorial place, the displaced and outmoded *tolérance*’s recuperation into narrative unsettles Haussmann’s unfolding technical order, generating an alternative spatiotemporal disposition that makes Paris otherly intelligible (and otherly mappable). While the *lieu propre* founded on the prostitute’s inscribed body is untenable in a stable synchronic present, the tolerated brothel’s selectively permeable boundaries nonetheless engender possibilities of deterritorialization and reterritorialization that allow for a fluid (if provisional) remapping of an everyday reality perceived as unabidable. In short, the fin-de-siècle Parisian *maison de tolérance* is here both the posited center of an alternative map and the de-centered trace of a “real” map that has become unreadable and unreliable: potentially (but not only) a refuge, potentially (but not only) a site and means of contestation.

As Goncourt’s laments about the passing of a Paris where he felt at home adumbrate, the heterotopography proposed by Goncourt’s narrative is resolutely and somewhat traditionally nostalgic, recuperating fragments of the past in order to construct a familiar present where he will no

¹⁰⁵ Kevin Hetherington, *The Badlands of Modernity: Heterotopia and Social Ordering* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 51.

¹⁰⁶ Foucault, “Des espaces autres,” 1578.

longer be estranged. If his novelistic writings often delve into the *bas-fonds*, as he explains in the *Journal* while preparing to write *Élisa*, it is not for the literary timeliness of the topic, but rather to preserve what is being lost to modernization, “[p]arce que c’est dans le bas qu’au milieu de l’effacement d’une civilisation se conserve le caractère des choses.”¹⁰⁷ The proliferation of domestic metaphors in the journal, along with the elaboration of the eighteen “obscures et abjectes demeures” that fail to contain the protagonist in *La Fille Élisa*, further indicates a case of what Svetlana Boym has named “restorative nostalgia”: the striving for a “transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home,” where it is possible to “know that things are in their places and so are you.”¹⁰⁸ The impermanent nature of *Élisa*’s dwellings, which stream by at the breakneck speed of urban circulation, also suggests that the reconstruction of the *maison*, and thereby the isolation of a Parisian present able to sustain its familiarity, remains (like the city it resists) in progress.

Near the end of *Élisa*’s “prostitutional episode,” the narrative intensifies its response to the protagonist’s escalating resistance to authority – an acceleration that, as we saw earlier, the narrator implicitly facilitates in his complicity with the *tenancière*, and which leads to a collapse of syntactic coherence as Goncourt’s discursive tempo adopts the rhythm of *Élisa*’s “esprit mobile, inattentionné, distrait, fuyant, vide et plein de vague, ne pouvant s’arrêter sur rien [...]” (146). By contrast, the patient detail and relative calm of Goncourt’s description of *Élisa*’s subsequent and final brothel turn, at a *maison à soldats* on the avenue de Suffren near the École militaire, seem out of place. Unlike the “17,” this house is precisely located, in a “pâté de constructions” on a new portion of the avenue opened in 1867;¹⁰⁹ both the brothel and its *pensionnaires* are the object of variegated and

¹⁰⁷ Edmond de Goncourt, *Journal* (December 3, 1871)

¹⁰⁸ Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, xviii, 251.

¹⁰⁹ The precise location is not specified, but the text’s reference to the corner of l’avenue de Suffren and the boulevard de Lowendal, as well as its description of the *maison*’s positioning with respect to the École militaire, suggest that it is located on the portion of the avenue extended by Napoléon III and Haussmann and dedicated in 1867.

vibrant descriptions, with architectural details and named, idiosyncratic *filles* replacing the generic fog of Goncourt's earlier tableau. We see inside *la maison au gros numéro* at night (albeit only the relatively chaste ground-floor *estaminet*), its interior replete with the "éclairage brûlant, traversé de lueurs, de reflets, de miroitements électriques et aveuglants" that *Marthe* portrays in such glaring detail (149). The protagonist again emerges from the "type général de la prostituée," as we learn that "[c]ette vie nocturne, cette vie éreintante, cette vie prodigue de son corps, Élisabeth la préféra, tout de suite, à la tranquillité épicière, à la claustration monotone, au train-train bonasse des établissements affectés aux *pékins*" (153).¹¹⁰ Sturdily based in *documents humains*, the chapters devoted to the *maison à soldats* nonetheless escape the lifeless rigor of Goncourt's earlier documentary scenes.¹¹¹ The vibrant representability of this last tolerated brothel is telling: this is no longer the dusty relic of the 1840s, but rather a contemporary landmark, belonging in both location and temperament to the "nouvel alignement" and in keeping with diegetic time. The transition from the hodgepodge architecture that interrupted the straight-lined clarity of Élisabeth's reglementary stroll to this fully modernized and regularized section of Paris would seem to be a preliminary capitulation to an external authority, marking a subtle shift from the strategic search for a *lieu propre* outside of time ("*une victoire du lieu sur le temps*"¹¹²) to a tactical tracing of a narrative space within the Haussmannian grid. Abandoning the thus far futile effort to contain Élisabeth in the past, Goncourt locates her (and hence himself) in a provisionally synchronic present: not the homeliest of houses, perhaps, but a narrative dwelling nonetheless.

¹¹⁰ Her subjective reemergence is unsurprisingly met with a series of demonstrative locators.

¹¹¹ If, as David Baguley points out, the individual portraits of the nine *filles* in the *maison à soldats* primarily reflect Goncourt's own research carried out around the École militaire, they are nonetheless given names from articles published in *La Gazette des Tribunaux* in the 1830s and 1840s (in Goncourt, *Œuvres complètes*, t.VIII: *La fille Élisabeth*, 155n78).

¹¹² Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien*, 60. Emphasis original.

Predictably, however, an uncanny incursion – and an uncanny excursion – definitively fracture this assured portrait of a domesticated *fille*, cementing the *maison de tolérance*'s abiding unhomeliness and precluding any possibility of mastery or further return. The first is Éliisa's charged interaction with the aptly monikered "Alexandrine *Phénomène*," her fellow hysteric *pensionnaire*.¹¹³ Éliisa notices the supernatural "luminosité" of Alexandrine's hair as the girls huddle together during a thunderstorm, thereafter slipping away with "la femme aux cheveux électriques" for an hour everyday to brush her hair, "à la fois effrayée et charmée" by the sparks that fly (160-161). Beyond the scene's thinly veiled sexual valence (and betrayal of Goncourt's uneasy confrontation with the prostitute's sexuality), the echoes of the *merlan* and his macabre busts suggest a renewed struggle to suppress the strangeness that irrupts without warning in even a well-managed, appropriately placed *maison* – here, most punctually, when Éliisa suddenly "échafaude" Alexandrine's "étrange et haute coiffure, où demeurerait quelque chose de la vie diabolique de ces cheveux" (161).¹¹⁴ Activating a subversive maneuverability from within the externally imposed place of the *maison de tolérance* by making use of "les failles que les conjonctures particulières ouvrent dans la surveillance du pouvoir propriétaire" (a manifestation of Certalian tactics, the "art du faible"), Éliisa increasingly defies appropriation as the Goncourtian *lieu propre*.¹¹⁵ Her growing distaste for men and for sex work, as well as her increasingly frequent hysteric episodes, will be directly attributed to her contact with Alexandrine, along with her emergent flirtation with the idea of leaving prostitution altogether – a resistance to official and authorial inscription that the novel looks to curb through recourse to (a

¹¹³ "*Phénomène*" is italicized in the original. Baguley locates the source for Goncourt's descriptions of Éliisa's hysteria (denoted "l'hystérie misandrine") as Jean-Louis Brachet's 1847 *Traité de l'hystérie* (Goncourt, *Œuvres complètes*, t.VIII: *La fille Elisa*, 166n95 *et passim*).

¹¹⁴ The dual resonance of the scaffold, an instrument of both construction and execution, ties this scene's diabolical *étrangeté* to both the source and impending consequence of the novel's interior troubles.

¹¹⁵ Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien*, 61.

familiar) strategy: “il venait vaguement à la prostituée l’idée de quitter le métier, et peut-être l’eût-elle déjà fait sans cette dette, sans cette chaîne [...]” (168).

His dominion over the protagonist thus threatened by a breed of mobility that lies beneath the threshold of visibility, as made manifest by the Alexandrine phenomenon, Goncourt promptly redoubles his strategic efforts to cure Élisabeth of her intractability, introducing (as before in the Bourlemont brothel) an out-of-character sentimental interlude to channel her hysteric energy into a normative, and normalizing, outlet: Élisabeth’s zealous affection for a *soldat de ligne* named Tanchon. Presented as an enigma, at odds with the temperament of “cette femme qui n’avait jamais aimé,” the relationship ostensibly draws its inspiration from the packet of soldiers’ letters received from the ruins of the Cité brothel, adduced a few pages earlier in an excursus about the ties that bind *soldat* and *fille* (169).¹¹⁶ Goncourt’s reintroduction of the material debris that Haussmannization has left behind, textually transposed by the circulating letters, effectuates an inverse defamiliarization, willfully incorporating the detritus of Paris past into the interior of the otherwise contextually synchronic, contemporary *maison*. By activating the sentimental mechanisms described in the letters (the soldier’s jealous love for the prostitute, his proud promenades with her in the streets, his ability to make her feel like a “maîtresse”), Goncourt renders Élisabeth susceptible to masculine attachment, taming her rebellious mobility by drawing her to Tanchon before indirectly leading her out into the streets of Paris for the second and final time on the soldier’s arm. The narrative *ban* that follows the novel’s whirlwind account of their courting – textually manifested only by Élisabeth’s joyous departure from the brothel for her amorous excursion, a series of ominous ellipses, and her dazed return at nightfall with blood-stained fingernails (the latter reported only by an interpolated “Déposition du

¹¹⁶ Ricatte has demonstrated that the purported reference is, in fact, misleading: Goncourt takes the text for Tanchon’s letter, which will be directly transcribed during the prison episode, from *La Gazette des Tribunaux*. Ricatte shows this to be a generalized tendency in the novel, whereby Goncourt inscribes authentic documents but misattributes their original context. *La genèse de La fille Elisa*, 72 *et passim*.

témoin,” and thus signaling a disruption of the narrator’s observational purview) – ends the long analeptic reprisal of Élisabeth’s prostitutional narrative and leads to her permanent and complete inscription, a securing of her mobile body carried out at the cost of Goncourt’s proper authority. Significantly, as we discover much later, the elided scene of Élisabeth’s rape and her subsequent murder of Tanchon – a doubly penetrative actualization of the “contact colère, comme dans un viol” of the novel’s initial characterization of Parisian prostitution – occurs in a cemetery (another Foucauldian heterotopia) in the Bois de Boulogne, an excentric, marginal space as yet incompletely annexed by Haussmannization. Goncourt displaces Élisabeth to the interstitial heterochrony of the partially modernized margins one final time in order to occasion her reinscription into another order, this time in a different heterotopic “house” with more commanding instruments of discipline at its disposal than the *tenancière*’s economy: the *maison de détention*, Noirlieu.¹¹⁷

In conveying Élisabeth’s body from the *maison de tolérance* to the *maison à soldats* to the *maison de détention*, the three qualifiers charting a marked progression toward increasingly overt and consolidated extratextual authority, Goncourt seems to suggest that urban “tolérance” – the brothel’s loosely defined position, neither legally authorized nor against the law – is unsustainable, leaving detention as the only strategic resolution. In the second half of the novel, the episode of “la prison et la prisonnière,” the narrative itself thus becomes a hermetically “closed house,” compensating for the diegetic *maisons* that fail to contain Élisabeth’s mobility and the ominous breed of brothel familiarity that corresponds to the modern order. Only by circumscribing Élisabeth’s prostitutional narrative within the detaining frame of her legal trial and punishment, with Élisabeth herself now dispossessed of her name in favor of another identitarily indeterminate *gros numéro* (her prison number, 7999), can Goncourt textually surmount her refusal to remain within the brothel’s

¹¹⁷ As both Baguley and Ricatte point out, “Noirlieu” is a pseudonym for Clermont, the institution where the Goncourt brothers carried out research for *Élisabeth*.

walls. In the end, Goncourt cannot extricate himself from the “tolerated” *lieu propre* he founds on Élisabeth’s body; the boundaries shared between interior and exterior are not only a point of separation, but also of contact, a passage or point of entry that his diachronic interloping creates. In his strategic returns to the *maison de tolérance*, Goncourt is thus ultimately no less a “voyageur” than in the new Parisian “Babylone de l’avenir”; his nostalgic retreat to the “closed house” of the past necessarily breaches its enclosure, folding the present space into this past order and unveiling his own enduring *étrangeté*. Like Simmel’s stranger, Goncourt’s position in the *maison de tolérance* “is fundamentally affected by the fact that he does not belong in it initially and that he brings qualities into it that are not, and cannot be, indigenous to it.”¹¹⁸ His error, to borrow Deleuze’s diagnosis of Descartes, is to believe that “la distinction réelle entre parties entraîn[e] la séparabilité.”¹¹⁹ And so, he must ultimately resist familiarization of the modern capital through the nostalgic recuperation of its past fragments; to superimpose the past on the present would be to lose his own place, his contemporary *étrangeté*, and therefore his point of access to the other social paradigm whose passing he laments. The Goncourtian resolution to the problem of Paris’s impropriety is instead to isolate the nostalgic order of a “Paris [qui] s’en va” in narrative – a gesture only realizable at the expense of his own ability to dwell there. Only in binding Élisabeth’s heterotopic imprisonment at Noirlieu (a “black place” that is also, in the end, a narrative black hole or *point de fuite*) in text – a secure interior within which Élisabeth, the embodiment of Paris’s nomadic modernity and the vehicle of its uncanny incursions, is immured and ineradicably silenced – is Goncourt able to appropriate in the present a discursive *lieu propre*, finally consolidating and assuming an authorial position, the narrative “je,” as Élisabeth passes away.

¹¹⁸ Georg Simmel, “The Stranger,” in *On Individuality and Social Forms* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1972), 143.

¹¹⁹ Gilles Deleuze, *Le pli - Leibniz et le baroque* (Paris: Minuit, 1988), 8.

Tolerating Disorder

Whereas Goncourt moves to tame the city's uncanny strangeness by coalescing the proliferation of unhomely homes into the unequivocal interior of the *maison de détention*, Huysmans pursues a path of dispersion, persistently revealing the apparently univocal "voie" (the boulevard, the brothel, present space and time, the naturalist "page de marbre tirée d'un bloc") to be a patchwork assemblage composed of shifting, coterminous planes of spatiality and temporality. Rather than move to stifle the unhomeliness that surges within the provisional *lieu propre*, as does Goncourt, Huysmans endeavors to apprehend and perpetuate the moment of defamiliarization within, inscribing in text a synchronic "[m]aintenant qui dure" effectuated through what Vidler describes as "the forced reconciliation of present and past in an image that refuses any reduction to one or the other."¹²⁰ Huysmans renders urban modernity not through a substitutive or metaphorical vision of an alternative present, that is to say, but rather through synecdoche (etymologically, a "receiving together" or "simultaneous understanding"), through the disclosure of the dissonant yet imbricated flows that constitute fin-de-siècle space and time.¹²¹ Instead of seeking refuge in a territorial configuration plucked directly from the past, Huysmansian narrative operates on and within the terrain of modern and modernizing Paris, maneuvering tactically through the space of the other and making productive use of urban circumstances that, as Certeau writes, "l'instant précis d'une intervention transforme en situation favorable."¹²² As we have seen with regard to Huysmans's treatment of the Bièvre and of Marthe's *rupture de ban*, authorial intervention in these circumstantial currents allows for a narratively productive unsettling of the modern space, as both the river and the

¹²⁰ Anthony Vidler, *The Architectural Uncanny: Essays in the Modern Unhomely* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 201.

¹²¹ The dynamic will resurface in *À rebours*, where des Esseintes praises the *maison de tolérance* in the moment of its disappearance, as the Parisian prostitutional landscape comes to be dominated by the clandestine pleasures of the *brasserie à femmes*. I discuss the scene in the introduction to Chapter Two.

¹²² Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien*, 63.

prostitute “circulent, vont et viennent, débordent et dérivent dans un relief imposé, mouvances écumeuses d’une mer s’insinuant parmi les rochers et les dédales d’un ordre établi.”¹²³ I should emphasize that there is, in Huysmans (as in Goncourt), a drive for and struggle with naturalist mastery of the prostitute’s body and space of practice, a grasping for a *lieu propre* (a concept aligned in Certeau with the strategy of the powerful rather than the tactics of the weak), provisionally articulated upon the *ban* the *filles inscrites* engenders. There is no nostalgic return in *Marthe* to a localizable moment perceived as lost, however, as the *lieu propre* is a place (in narrative, in a pre-renovation city conceivable as a unified whole, in the “jeune et sérieuse école du roman moderne”) that the young Huysmans, unlike Goncourt, has never (even illusorily) had.

Emblematic of Huysmans’s urban dynamics, the narrative event of Marthe’s brothel stay is both internally disjunctive (i.e., uncanny) and further multiplied through repeated narrative iterations that, in “l’absence d’un propre,” produce a flurry of evolving and differently improper *coins désolés*. The one lived episode in the *maison de tolérance* is represented in three scenes and from three distinct perspectives, which we shall briefly examine in turn: Marthe’s initiatory “inscription” into the brothel, which we have already introduced; a fleeting, inventive reminiscence about her time in the *tolérance*, inspired by an engraving she admires in Léo’s apartment; and a haunted reliving of her prostitution late in the novel, brought on by a drunken stupor. Early in the first brothel scene, Marthe turns her attention from the dazzling splendors of the brothel’s lavish interior to her own garish reflection. Struck by the exaggerated lines and embellished hues of her mirror image (“ses sourcils charbonnés,” “ses lèvres rouges comme des viandes saignantes,” “sa poitrine ramassée et peureuse,” “ses yeux [qui] lui parurent, dans leur cerne de pensil, s’être creusés bizarrement”), Marthe becomes aware of the corporeal traces of her brothel inscription, experiencing a jolt of stupefied estrangement whereby “[e]lle ne pouvait croire que cette image fût la sienne” (84). If

¹²³ Ibid., 57.

Marthe cannot believe she is what and where she sees – after all, as Foucault tells us, “c’est à partir du miroir que je me découvre absent à la place où je suis puisque je me vois là-bas”¹²⁴ – it is perhaps first because her image is not, or at least not strictly, “la sienne”: as a *fille de maison*, Marthe’s projected image is the sign that sells her body, and both are available to any man who enters and “lui f[a]it signe” (86). The grammatical shiftiness of “la sienne” (“his” or “hers”) is here again illuminating, allowing for attribution of the image to Marthe, to one of her clients (“l’un de ces hommes” whose gaze she shudderingly senses “fouiller sous la gaze” of her dress), or indeed to the narrator, whose presence is made manifest (and aligned with the client’s) by a sympathetic explanation of the “persistants ennuis” that lead men to the brothel (ibid.).

Elizabeth Grosz has observed (with respect to Lacan) that the mirror “not only presents the subject with an image of its own body in a visualised exteriority, but also duplicates the environment, placing real and virtual space in contiguous relations.”¹²⁵ In *Marthe*, the mirror’s visual manifestation of the protagonist’s alienation simultaneously reveals the spatial configurations at work and under construction in Huysmans’s *histoire d’une fille*. The aesthetic transformation enacted upon Marthe’s body in the *maison* is redolent of Paris’s modernization in microcosm, her natural features interrupted with artificially imposed contours designed to *aérer, unifier et embellir*: her brazenly lined eyes and lips echo Haussmann’s tree-lined boulevards and Napoléon III’s apocryphal color-coded map of projected *percements*; her showy stockings and corset, which reroute her overflowing flesh into their structured channels, are vestimentary adjuncts of the baron’s hygienic conduits and architectural “étoffes banalement luxueuses.”¹²⁶ Marthe’s mirror image is an anamorphic reflection of her vulnerable self, a distorted map that (read in the context of Huysmans’s *Croquis parisiens*)

¹²⁴ Foucault, “Des espaces autres,” 1575.

¹²⁵ Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies*, 1st ed (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 87.

¹²⁶ J.-K. Huysmans, *Croquis parisiens, À Vau-l’eau, Un Dilemme* (Paris: Stock, 1905), 86.

makes the troubled girl a *fille* worthy of narrative attention by spatializing the sequential before and after of her defamiliarizing makeover into contiguous durations of old and new. Marthe's failed self-recognition in the brothel – a subjective lacuna, and thus doubly an absence since, the narrator clarifies, her presence in the *maison* is already an “abdication d'elle-même” – sets the stage for Huysmans's narrative appropriation of the protagonist's becoming-unfamiliar, her deterritorialization (83). Her dual inscription, into the *tolérance* and thereby into the “histoire d'une fille,” becomes, through Marthe's haunted returns, a narratorial point of access to the *maison*'s productive out-of-jointedness, a familiar strangeness ripe for tactical mobilization as Huysmans seeks to reterritorialize in text the uncanny turn whereby Marthe, dragged through the Parisian mud like the Bièvre's waters, confronts the boundary (the brothel's door, the mirror's glass, the *mise en carte*) that bifurcates her identity.

As we have seen, the novelistic space of the *maison*'s interior is not narratively sustainable in isolation; to dwell entirely within the brothel's walls would be to eliminate its unhomeliness and thus its heterotopian propensity for spatial alterity (along with, of course, its potential for plot). For Marthe's defamiliarizing domestication to remain a provisional *lieu propre*, and for her body to instantiate and perpetuate the Huysmansian *coin désolé*, both *fille* and *maison* must remain incompletely familiar, retaining their incongruity by occupying the threshold between the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich*. To circumscribe her within the uncanny interstice – that is, to master in narrative a place that must continue to resist mastery in order to remain *propre* – Huysmans makes use of Marthe's own inability to master her brothel episode while she is *en rupture de ban*, dwelling in the plot of progressive desolation bounded by her nostalgic brothel reminiscences and her abject brothel remembering, by the recurrent “besoin de marcher, d'aller à l'air” that forestalls her devolution into prosaic domesticity and the latent threat of the *mise en carte* that delimits her urban mobility. Thus, when Marthe's interaction with Léo quickly becomes intolerably tedious, their conversation “de plus

en plus bête,” a mnemonic return to the *maison* sparked by an off-kilter contemplation of a Hogarth engraving in the writer’s apartment infuses the domestic space with the brothel’s unhomely charge (91). Unlike the *tolérance*’s mirror, the “épisode de la vie des courtisanes” on Léo’s wall leads Marthe to a doubly fictional anagnorisis: “Comme c’est bien cela!” (93).¹²⁷ In a play of slippery referentiality reminiscent of Flaubert’s “[c]’est là ce que nous avons eu de meilleur,” Marthe here locates herself and her prostitutional “souvenirs précis” in another place and time, through an indeterminate demonstrative that points to an external narrative: the visual vignette of a London brothel in the 1730s, whose snapshot temporality transposes that of the *Croquis parisiens*.¹²⁸ Marthe’s illusive recognition reinforces the chronotopic alterity of her time in the *maison de tolérance*, exaggeratedly materializing the spatiotemporal disconnect (the *ban*) between the Huysmansian brothel and the Haussmannian map of modern Paris. In reawakening “cette saveur de fille qu’elle s’étudiait à faire disparaître,” moreover, the scene folds the *tolérance*’s particular breed of “domestic pleasures” into the non-prostitutional episode, channeling its disjointedness as a means of resisting and inverting the narrative dynamic that Robert Ziegler characterizes as “the initial pleasures of domesticity dissolving into the disenchantments of familiarity” (93).¹²⁹ Even in this early naturalist work, with its ostensible fidelity to contemporary “vérité terre à terre,” Huysmans resists familiarity as insufferable banality, suggesting that artistic truth lies not in the direct reflection of reality but rather in its refraction, or what he would go on to praise in Degas’s brothel monotypes as “la sensation de l’étrange exact, de

¹²⁷ *Marthe*’s most recent translator, Brendan King, notes that the engraving Huysmans describes is in fact from the series “A Rake’s Progress,” not (as the text indicates) “A Harlot’s Progress” – thus adding a further layer of fiction to Marthe’s self-recognition. In Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Marthe: The Story of a Whore*, trans. Brendan King (Sawtry, UK: Dedalus, 2006), 141n.

¹²⁸ As Ziegler notes, “Marthe [...] imputes a greater accuracy to Hogarth’s engraved representation of whorehouse life than to her own personal experience” (“Feminized Reality/Male Realism,” 192).

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 190. Ziegler refers to the unhappy home life shared by Marthe and Léo after her departure from both the brothel and the Bobino.

l'invu si juste"¹³⁰ – hence giving new meaning to Ruth B. Antosh's proclamation that the author "was never at home as a naturalist."¹³¹

Late in the novel, after Marthe's definitive separation from both Léo and Ginginet, the protagonist revisits her stay in the brothel for a third and final time. In the wake of a series of amorous disenchantments – a misguided effort at reconciliation with Léo, a drunken period as the *femme entretenue* of a wealthy but imbecilic suitor, a string of lustless encounters with "[u]ne foule de jeunes gens" in the apartment her lover inadvisedly leases in her name – Marthe, alone and unable to sleep, begins to reminisce about her former life. In a *mise-en-abyme* of lived narration, which situates Marthe as both actor and spectator of her own past and furnishes the reader with new details about life in the *tolérance*, we return to her prostitutional inscription:

[E]lle songea au passé. Elle en vint à pleurer sa petite fille qui était morte en naissant et à aimer presque le jeune homme qui l'avait soignée dans cette crise horrible; puis à mesure que sa lamentable vie se déroulait devant elle, comme les tableaux changeants d'un kaléidoscope, elle frissonnait, mesurant la profondeur des boues où elle avait plongé, et quand elle arriva à cette phase de son existence où elle avait servi dans le régiment des mercenaires, alors, dans le silence de l'alcôve, se dressa, avec sa robe bariolée et ses hurlements de sinistre joie, le spectre des maisons de filles.

Elle entraît, confuse, et des âmes, rendues charitables par l'ivresse, lui disaient: N'aie donc pas peur, tu t'y feras bien vite [...].(154)

The hallucinatory montage atomizes Marthe's past into a swirling constellation of images that analeptically retrace her path to the whorehouse (both the house *of* whores and the house *as* whore, ostentatiously outfitted in "sa robe bariolée"¹³²). Though the novel gives the illusion of choice as Marthe approaches the brothel's threshold, there is no doubt that she will (re)enter the spectral *maison*, her past and her present becoming coterminous in a diegetic "maintenant disjoint." Now

¹³⁰ Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Certains: G. Moreau, Degas, Chéret, Wisthler* [sic], *Rops, Le monstre, Le fer, etc.*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Tresse & Stock, 1894), 27.

¹³¹ Ruth B. Antosh, *Reality and Illusion in the Novels of J.-K. Huysmans* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1986), 9.

¹³² Christopher Prendergast has shown the term "bariolé" to be a privileged literary descriptor for Parisian modernity (e.g., in Zola's *La Curée*). *Paris and the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1995), 40.

imbued with affective candor that was conspicuously absent in the first telling, Marthe's remembering of her early biography is a textual reproduction of a missing original; her haunted recall, like the brothel's mirror and the Hogarth engraving, serves to show the reader where she is not. With the retrospective introduction of pathos, Marthe is now effectively "débile et navrée" (rather than "fraîche et affriolante") at the moment of her inscription – a shift further evidenced by the sympathetic platitudes of the previously impassive *filles* who welcome her into the *maison*. Imputing a narrative temporality to the brothel mirror's atemporal juxtaposition of Marthe's vulnerable self and her prostituted façade by relocating the uncanny defamiliarization to the brothel's threshold, and so to the act of her inscription, the phantasmatic return to the *tolérance* mobilizes the mirror's "ennuyeuse symétrie" and makes the house more amenable to narrative dwelling; after all, as Certeau writes, "[o]n n'habite que des lieux hantés [...]".¹³³

That Marthe's oneiric remembrance extends before her like a kaleidoscope whose configuration morphs at the unpredictable twist of another's hand further likens her fate to that of her urban home, the city whose susceptible paths and plots are effaced and reimagined at Haussmann's command. It also reveals the author's tactics to be only equivocally and partially an "art du faible"; tellingly, the "tableaux changeants d'un kaléidoscope" shift only with authorial intervention. In "Central Park," Walter Benjamin finds "profound truth" in the image of the kaleidoscope, "which with every turn of the hand dissolves the established order into a new array" through a strategic game of "mirrors that enable[s] an image of 'order' to prevail."¹³⁴ If Huysmans's cartographic manipulations are tactical within the extratextual context of modernizing Paris – operating within the grid of the Haussmannian order, on the interstitial terrain of what Sanford

¹³³ Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien*, 162.

¹³⁴ Walter Benjamin, *The Writer of Modern Life: Essays on Charles Baudelaire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 137. Benjamin refers to Baudelaire who, of course, famously refers to the *flâneur* in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* as a "kaleidoscope doué de conscience."

Kwinter terms a “shifting, transitory, and volatile materiality” – they are nonetheless strategic in the context of the narrative.¹³⁵ In orienting and enclosing Marthe’s susceptible body in narrative as grounds for an authorial *lieu propre*, much as renovations undertaken by Haussmann hygienically channel the Bièvre into a tunneled sewer, Huysmans stands in for – and yet against – the planner, strategically containing the disorderly flow vehiculated by the prostitute in order to arrest its passing: here, its passing away, its enduring containment by another’s “banal alignement.” With its selectively permeable boundaries and its heterotopian incongruity with respect to the fin-de-siècle context, the tolerated brothel is complicit in Huysmans’s counter-strategic subversion of the Haussmannian alignment. As Georges Didi-Huberman muses, “[d]ans le kaléidoscope, la poussière des menus objets reste erratique, mais elle est enfermée dans une boîte à malices, une boîte intelligente, une boîte à structure et à visibilité.”¹³⁶ Huysmans’s repetition and distortion of the brothel’s mirror image, effectuated through the lens of Marthe’s mnemonic returns, enables an authorial order to prevail within the novelistic *ban* of the virtual brothel (the kaleidoscope’s shifty “boîte à structure et à visibilité”), its walls enveloping the event of the *coin*’s desolation within their spectral frame without taming its becoming into static being by confining Marthe’s body to the Bièvre’s fate.

Indeed, though it is Marthe who enters the ghostly *maison* in this final return, only the narrator now inhabits it; both Marthe’s name and her presence are omitted from the account that follows her halting reentry into the brothel, as if to spare her body the subjective onslaught of the lived remembrance in order to sustain it for narrative posterity. Reminiscent of *Élisa*, the tableau galvanizes the previously unhomely interior of the *tolérance* in the protagonist’s absence with

¹³⁵ Sanford Kwinter, *Architectures of Time: Toward a Theory of the Event in Modernist Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002), 122. Tactics, as Kwinter observes following Certeau, “proceeds [...] by redistributing the macroeffects of power into a micrological ‘space’ that strategy itself, precisely *because it is strong* (and bound to territory/*un propre*) cannot enter” (123).

¹³⁶ Georges Didi-Huberman, “Connaissance par le kaleidoscope,” *Études photographiques* no. 7, Par les yeux de la science/Surréalisme et photographie (May 1, 2000): 5, <http://etudesphotographiques.revues.org/index204.html>.

masterfully *vraisemblable* details and characters (the timetable of a typical evening, the games of cards, the drunken propositions, the hairdresser M. Henri, the *tenancière* now identified as “la mère Jules”), with Marthe’s name reappearing only in a spurious summation of the brothel’s charms: “Ce fut une nouvelle fascination pour Marthe [...] elle se souvint avec un singulier plaisir de ces ardeurs et de ces fièvres [...]” (156). And yet, the narrator’s novel familiarity with brothel life is itself an uncanny deterritorialization, as what at first seems to be Marthe’s reminiscence is revealed upon closer scrutiny to be a kaleidoscopic “*démontage*” and “*remontage*,” an authorial play of tricks and mirrors. Significantly, we learn as the bordello phantasm fades, Marthe has been *radiée* and is longer “sujette du bureau des mœurs”; the hallucinatory recapitulation of her brothel past does not now stem from her paranoia at being caught by the police, since Ginginet has vouched for her, “se disant prêt à l’épouser” (157). If Marthe’s deletion from the prostitutional register and the divestment of her *carte* leave her off the grid of the official order – and thus freely available for Huysmans’s emplacement – the *radiation* also abrogates the narrative *ban* that kept her mobility in check and bound her to the authorial framework. The prevailing “order” of the Huysmansian *tolérance* is a reconfigured iteration of the Haussmannian paradigm it resists: a return to the initial striving for location and containment of the prostitute’s renewedly refractory body, an appropriation that can only occur at Marthe’s (and *Marthe’s*) expense.¹³⁷ Just as Huysmans’s tactical maneuvering within the Haussmannian territory destabilizes the official order, in other words, the fragmentary shards of Marthe’s peripatetic disorder – her own tactical mobilizations, given room to roam by her *radiation* – threaten to erode the narrative “boîte à malices” from within. And so, even without the specter of the *mise en carte*, Marthe is now not only drawn to the brothel “comme un insecte par le feu des lampes,” but also certain of (and haunted by) the inevitability of her return, by “la pensée qu’elle allait refaire à nouveau partie de ce bétail que la police doit surveiller et traquer sans relâche” (157). The text makes

¹³⁷ Didi-Huberman, “Connaissance par le kaléidoscope.”

a cursory gesture toward acknowledging the unmitigated misery of Marthe's first brothel stint – “la prison éloignait toutes les difficultés de l'existence [...] et cependant, quelle misère et quelle abjection!” – only to stifle it in order to draw her more forcefully into the *maison*'s hermetic purview, now otherly complicit with the authorial oversight of an unruly prostitutional narrative (157). The kaleidoscopic episode reveals the Huysmansian *coin désolé* to be apprehensible only as a synthetic narrative assemblage of the diachronic “dust” of urban experience, a recuperation of the lived past into the imaged present brought evanescently into focus through the reflective tricks of an authorial viewfinder; it remains contingent, however, unsettled in time and space and sustainable only until the inevitable twist of a more authoritative hand dissolves the author's illusory order – or until the debris within abrade or evade the frame that holds them in their “proper” place.

As Huysmans brings his first novel to a close, he predictably joins Goncourt in opting for tenable security over a contingent *propre*, tightly sealing Marthe's body in stratified layers of textual and architectural reserve that materialize the surveillance to which she is subjected as a *filie inscrite*. In a *mise en abyme* of distancing textuality, the reader discovers through an interpolated letter, written by Léo and read “à mi-voix” by Léo's friend (an intern at the Lariboisière hospital, where Ginginet's body is about to be autopsied), that Léo has learned from the intern that Marthe has indeed returned to the *maison de tolérance*, “le tripot qu'elle habitait jadis” (an expression that Léo ironically denounces in the letter as an unnecessary “circonlocution”) (163). Even multiply inscribed and securely affixed to text, Marthe's life in the *maison de tolérance* cannot be represented but only elliptically adduced, circumscribed from without; to represent the banality of Marthe's brothel “vérité terre à terre” would be to extinguish its productive unhomeliness, compromising the narrator's own necessary *étrangeté* in the house's interior. “Ce qui se montre désigne ce qui n'est plus,” as Certeau writes; like Goncourt, Huysmans can only generate and sustain the desired *lieu propre* at the expense of his ability

to inhabit it, only writing *Marthe* when Marthe “n’est plus.”¹³⁸ Once fully inscribed within the *maison*, its door firmly sealed through layers of narrative (Huysmans) or legal authority (Goncourt), the prostitute’s body is inaccessible and unobservable as a naturalist *document humain*. The “reserve” afforded by the prostitute’s inscription comes at the cost of the narrative; the security of the hermetic and the productivity of the hermeneutic are at cross purposes.

And yet, despite moving to suppress Marthe’s attested threat to authorial mastery through her textual *radiation* and extratextual reinscription, Huysmans, unlike Goncourt (and unlike Zola, as we will see in Chapter Three), does not condemn his *fille* to death, nor even *détention*.¹³⁹ In a letter written shortly after *Marthe*’s original publication, Huysmans explains his unorthodox ending: “je n’ai point voulu jeter sur la table vêtue de zinc, Marthe, nue et ventre ouvert, laissant voir le jeu des nerfs et des muscles, comme le jeu des tuyaux d’un orgue qu’on entr’ouvre. Cette fin qui n’en est pas une est à coup sûr plus conforme à la réalité que la mort qui est usée comme un vieux drame.”¹⁴⁰ What would soon come to be known as the “maison close” is here perceived to be an opening, a uniquely Huysmansian take on naturalism’s environmental determinism that translates fin-de-siècle reality as a fabric of imperfect enclosures and disclosures – a practice at odds with Zola’s conception of the “terrain solide.” Indeed, the spatial language employed by the author in a later reflection on his progressive disenchantment with Zolian naturalism suggests *Marthe*’s brothel “ending that is not *one*” (neither singular nor final) to be a metaphor for Huysmans’s evolving narrative practice. In the “Préface écrite vingt ans après le roman” appended to the 1903 edition of *À rebours*, naturalism is

¹³⁸ Certeau, *L’invention du quotidien*, 162. Ziegler similarly observes that “It is with the elimination of the heroine [...] that Huysmans’ eponymous novel can stand forth, its realist aesthetic simultaneously confirmed and invalidated by the conversion of life into art and Marthe into *Marthe*” (Ziegler, “Feminized Reality/Male Realism,” 196).

¹³⁹ This despite the assertion (adduced earlier in this chapter) that the *atelier*, cited as the impetus for Marthe’s coming to prostitution, is “l’antichambre de Saint-Lazare.”

¹⁴⁰ J.-K Huysmans, *Lettres à Théodore Hannon, 1876-1886*, ed. Pierre Cogny and Christian Berg (Saint-Cyr-sur-Loire: Christian Piro, 1985), 35. The letter is dated December 16, 1876.

evoked as a dead-end tunnel (“nous devons nous demander si le naturalisme n’aboutissait pas à une impasse et si nous n’allions pas bientôt nous heurter contre le mur du fond”), a dead-end street (“un cul-de-sac où je suffoquais”), and an inescapable aesthetic enclosure (“une littérature sans issue”).¹⁴¹ The literary scene on which *Marthe* would make Huysmans’s place is increasingly experienced as a stiflingly enclosed structure from which the author, like his first protagonist, feels a mounting urge to escape, “d’ouvrir les fenêtres, de fuir un milieu où j’étouffais[.]”¹⁴² Naturalism comes to be figured as a hermetically “closed house” or *maison de détention* (with Zola, that “artiste un peu massif, mais doué de puissants poumons et de gros poings,”¹⁴³ its authorial *police des mœurs*), binding its author to a novelistic space characterized in *Là-bas* as “sans portes et sans fenêtres.”¹⁴⁴ As already adumbrated in *Marthe*, Huysmans aspires to make of the novel a literary space of *tolérance*: an enclosure whose spatiotemporal incongruity, along with its imperfectly shuttered windows and “yawning” door, preserves the potential “de briser les limites du roman, d’y faire entrer l’art.”¹⁴⁵ As Dr. Julien Jeannel observes of tolerated prostitution in 1868, “L’inscription [...] donne [...] une certaine liberté étroitement limitée, il est vrai, par le règlement, mais enfin une liberté réelle, dans l’exercice de son infâme métier, c’est cette liberté qu’on appelle tolérance.”¹⁴⁶ If he fails in this first novel to sustain the moment of the *coin désolé*’s resistance to domestication, its becoming modern by becoming *désolé* – capitulating, as will his protagonist des Esseintes, to the pull of modern Paris – Huysmans

¹⁴¹ Huysmans, “Préface écrite vingt ans après le roman,” 322.

¹⁴² Ibid., 329.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Joris-Karl Huysmans, *Là-bas* (Paris: Plon-Nourrit et Cie, 1908), 24.

¹⁴⁵ Robert Ziegler argues that “Huysmans’s text itself emerges as a figural *maison close*, an ambiguous *topos* paradoxically suggesting universal access and exclusion.” “From Prostitution to Prayer: The Writer and His Public in J.-K. Huysmans,” *French Review* 67, no. 1 (October 1993): 38.

¹⁴⁶ Julien François Jeannel, *De la prostitution dans les grandes villes au dix-neuvième siècle et de l’extinction des maladies vénériennes* (Paris: Baillière, 1868), 195. I should emphasize that I am arguing here for a Huysmansian poetics, and not ethics, of “tolérance.”

nonetheless suggests that a literary map that would reflect the “vérité terre à terre” of a city experienced as a perpetually metamorphosing construction site must itself be conceived and considered as under construction. For Huysmans, aesthetic truth is accessible only as a tactical “mise en chantier” of the observed terrain, through the patchwork veil of an asynchronic map constructed and re-actualized on the interstitial grounds of literary and urban modernity.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille Plateaux*, 20.

Chapter Two

Turning Tricks, Turning the Tables: Plotting the Novel in the *Brasserie à femmes*

Adolphe Tabarant, *Virus d'amour* (1886) and Maurice Barrès, *Les Déracinés* (1897)

Je ne fais qu'un reproche à la prostitution,
c'est que c'est un mythe.

- Gustave Flaubert¹

In a late scene in Joris-Karl Huysmans's 1884 novel *À Rebours*, the nervous, neurotic protagonist Jean Floressas des Esseintes paces feverishly through his Fontenay-aux-Roses home on the outskirts of Paris, unable to stay still long enough to lose himself in his dreams. His thoughts begin to wander through time and space only when he mindlessly picks up his astrolabe – a medieval navigational device, acquired secondhand in a Paris bric-a-brac shop and previously serving little purpose other than to anchor a stack of books and papers.² Though des Esseintes hates modern Paris and all it stands for, and indeed has constructed his suburban estate as an isolating temple of protection from the capital's contamination, his visionary voyage of choice leads him back to the modern streets of the city's Left Bank. After a brief stop at the merchant who sold him the suddenly evocative astrolabe, he continues his backwards travels ("rétrograd[e]") and eventually arrives at his mobile mental destination: some good, old-fashioned Parisian *flânerie* and *vagabondage* in the Quartier latin, where he "embrass[e] par le souvenir, à vol d'oiseau, ces tas d'estaminets et de rues" (203). His retrospective view from above affords him the distance in both space and time to posit a critical reading of the urban memory text he walks. For him, these left-bank nightspots "répond[ent] à l'état d'âme d'une génération tout entière, et il en dégag[e] la synthèse de l'époque" (204). Literally and figuratively looking down at the swarms of "godiches" Parisians, des Esseintes's diagnosis of his age is bleak.

¹ Letter to Louise Colet, June 1, 1853. Quoted in Mireille Dottin-Orsini and Daniel Grojnowski, eds., *Un joli monde: Romans de la prostitution* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2008), 1.

² J.-K Huysmans, *À rebours*, ed. Daniel Grojnowski (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 2004), 202. All references are to this edition and are hereafter cited in text.

These bars that epitomize the modern era he disdains are the *brasseries à femmes*, female-staffed beer houses where the *serveuses* sell both drinks and sex to willing male consumers.³ In noting the contemporary ubiquity of these *débits de boisson*, des Esseintes proves to be an astute observer of a real shift in prostitutional practices in post-Haussmannian Paris. A home away from home for what Maurice Barrès calls “un prolétariat de bacheliers et de filles” – many of whom had recently arrived in Paris from the provinces – the *brasserie à femmes* came to supplant that other “home” of prostitution, the *maison de tolérance*.⁴ Couched under the guise of licit, non-erotic commerce, the nominally “clandestine” prostitution of the brasseries filled the gap left by Haussmann’s reconstruction of central Paris during the 1850s and 60s, which, as we saw in Chapter One, destroyed and displaced the *mauvais quartiers* that had housed most of the tolerated brothels.⁵ Beyond the practical factors that favored its proliferation, the increasing popularity of the brasserie also corresponded to a change in the habits and desires of the consuming public stemming from the *embourgeoisement* of French society (“l’évolution de la demande sexuelle”), as Alain Corbin has convincingly shown.⁶ No longer content to “se résoudre à entrer, à consommer, à payer et à sortir,”

³ Pamphlets, monographs, and novels from the time reveal a broad spectrum of more-or-less unflattering terms used to designate the female brasserie server: *serveuse*, *verseuse*, *fille de brasserie*, *grenouille*, etc. The brasseries themselves were alternately called *brasseries de femmes*, *caboulots*, *estaminets* (though there were also *caboulots* and *estaminets* that were not *brasseries à femmes*) or, “vulgairement,” *vacheries* (Charles Virmaître, *Trottoirs et lupanars* (Paris: H. Perrot, 1893), 28, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k54328072>).

⁴ “Un Prolétariat de bacheliers et de filles” is the title of Chapter V of Barrès’s novel *Les Déracinés* (1897). Huysmans acknowledges the link between the decline of the tolerated brothel and the flourishing of the brasserie in *À Rebours*: “Et, en effet, les symptômes étaient manifestes et certains; les maisons de tolérance disparaissaient, et à mesure que l’une d’elles se fermait, un caboulot opérait son ouverture” (204). I address the decline of the *maison de tolérance* in Chapter One, and discuss its supplanting by forms of clandestine prostitution both here and in Chapter Four.

⁵ Here, and throughout this chapter unless otherwise specified, my use of the generic term “brasserie” refers to the *brasserie à femmes*.

⁶ This argument, delineated in *À rebours*, is one of the central claims of Corbin’s *Les Filles de noce* (1978). On the brasserie à femmes as a new form of prostitution and as décor and force in Manet’s paintings, see “New forms: *serveuses* in the brasseries à femmes,” Hollis Clayson, *Representations of Prostitution in Early Third Republic France* (University of California, Los Angeles, 1984). and “Mutual Desire in the New Nightspots,” Hollis Clayson, *Painted Love: Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2003). Aside from Corbin’s and Clayson’s studies, there are few modern analyses that address the brasserie à femmes in any detail – especially in its literary incarnations. Charles Bernheimer briefly discusses the scene from *À Rebours* in *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 236–237.; Theresa Ann Gronberg provides a short history of the bars and an

as Huysmans writes, the new generation of Parisian youth eschews the rote routine of the *maisons de tolérance* in favor of the brasserie's perceived staging of rivalries, seductions, and hard-fought affections (204). By feigning indifference and leaving her client unsure of his *dénouement*, the brasserie whore ironically satisfies the new male desire or "ideal" by displacing and deferring it.⁷

The role of the *fille de brasserie*, I will suggest, is thus to inscribe her client artfully into a novelistic plot of her authoring: one in which he is the protagonist and she is the love interest. By selling him a side of romantic intrigue along with his bocks and her sex, she skillfully manipulates what Huysmans names the "*pensée dominante du siècle*" – according to des Esseintes, "*un sentimentalisme imbécile combiné avec une férocité pratique*" – to her advantage and her manager's monetary gain (205). Like the novelistic author and especially the *feuilletoniste*, whose hermeneutic and commercial success depends upon the continual creation, frustration and regeneration of desire, the brasserie girl is a master of writerly tease, knowing how to "*les faire patienter et les faire attendre*," to "*dire non, et puis enfin oui*" (205). The *filles de brasserie* supplement their beauty and womanly charms – on this point, des Esseintes finds them "*bien inférieures aux femmes enfermées dans des salons de luxe*" of the tolerated brothels – with the promise of a story: a cyclical and endlessly rewriteable one, whose female lead is a replaceable placeholder and whose ending is of little consequence for a male protagonist who can simply return to choose another girl's story the next day (205).⁸

analysis of Degas's and Manet's brasserie paintings in "Femmes de Brasserie," *Art History* 7, no. 3 (September 1984): 329–344.

⁷ Charles Bernheimer notes that "the appeal of these establishments had to do largely with the way they masked the final sexual purpose, allowing clients to imagine that they could succeed in the drama of seduction, beating out possible rivals, and that, given the absence of a *souteneur*, they might even become the one true love of a particular *verseuse*." Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute*, 236.

⁸ As I discuss later in this chapter, the most salient exception to this rule of inconsequentiality for the male brasserie client is in the case of transmission of disease, especially syphilis; in this frequently attested sense, the brasserie whore's story does leave its mark, both literally and metaphorically.

But what is it about the *brasserie à femmes* that prompts men of letters such as Huysmans and Barrès to declare it, for better or for worse, symbolic and symptomatic of their age? What kind of “story” is the *fille de brasserie* selling? Why do writers and other public figures find the brasserie so reprehensible that they would espouse the aesthetic and ethical virtues of the tolerated brothel in order to propose it as a viable alternative? In this chapter, I will use des Esseintes’s reflections from *À Rebours* as my own astrolabe, orienting my reading of the *brasserie à femmes* in Adolphe Tabarant’s largely forgotten naturalist novel *Virus d’amour* (1886) and Barrès’s *Les Déracinés* (1897), and guiding my analysis of the role of the brasserie prostitute in the literal and literary urban landscape of Third Republic Paris. For the clients of the *brasserie à femmes*, I will show, the narrative of urban desire (the drive to possess Paris) and the narrative of sexual desire (the drive to possess the prostitute) are intermingled – *brassées* – to form a hybrid fin-de-siècle novel of formation, a contingent verbal and gestural text of self-affirmation based on literary models. That the *fille de brasserie* can potentially inscribe these young men into a narrative of her authoring poses a threat to authorial mastery that is persistently effaced or displaced by the novels that contain her. By adopting alternative and decentered methods of “writing,” I argue, the *serveuse* not only erodes the imminent narrative control exercised through the authorial gaze but also calls into question the possibility of representing the prostitute and Paris at the end of the nineteenth century.

Fundamental to my argument, then, is the notion that the *fille de brasserie* takes on a uniquely authorial role, acquiring a narrative voice and generating story – “writing” – in a way that brothel prostitutes and streetwalkers do not. This may seem counterintuitive, given the overt theatricality predicated upon fantasy fulfillment that characterizes prostitution in many of the tolerated brothels. Indeed, one might thus contend that brothel prostitutes had long been in the business of selling stories, and Baudelaire’s metaphoric rendering of art as prostitution from the mid-century (“Qu’est-

ce que l'art? Prostitution") has made the reverse association something of a cliché.⁹ And yet, I want to suggest that whereas the *fille inscrite* of the brothel mimes a role in a familiar play, the stakes and origin of the brasserie girl's story are different – that the *essor* of brasserie prostitution in the 1870s and 1880s attests the *fille*'s writerly passage into narrative and subsequently sets the characteristic textual and metatextual power dynamics of author / character / reader of the naturalist novel into circulation. At the heart of the shift I seek to trace here are four categories of difference: the brasserie's target clientele and its desires and demands; the transition from regulated to clandestine prostitution and the role of surveillance; the nature and medium of the interaction between the *verseuse* and her customer; and the temporality and spatial disposition of the *fille de brasserie*'s venal practice. At stake, I will show, is the authority of not only the *fille de brasserie* but of the representative practices that undergird the realist and naturalist novel, and in fact the very notion of observational and mimetic mastery of Paris and her prostitutes.

Engendering (the) Capital

The opening decades of the Third Republic witnessed the arrival in Paris from the provinces of a surplus of young *bacheliers* in search of continued education, work, and a meaningful future.¹⁰ Overeducated and physically understimulated, their big-city desires fueled by a stream of Balzacian metaphors and ideals, these young men often found themselves disillusioned by the capital's unresponsiveness to their aspirations of upward mobility. While the overhaul Haussmann had undertaken was largely stabilizing by the time of the Second Empire's collapse upon France's 1870

⁹ Charles Baudelaire, "Fusées (1)," in *Œuvres posthumes* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1908), 76.

¹⁰ A *bachelier* was technically one who had passed the *baccalauréat* but came to represent in the period the adolescent males of the Latin Quarter more generally. On changing educational policies and their effects on young men in this period, see Carolyn J. Dean, *The Frail Social Body: Pornography, Homosexuality, and Other Fantasies in Interwar France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Judith Surkis, *Sexing the Citizen: Morality and Masculinity in France, 1870-1920* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006); and Pierre Moulinier, *La Naissance de l'étudiant moderne (XIXe siècle)* (Paris: Belin, 2002).

defeat in the Franco-Prussian War, and thus the streets of the city no longer threatened to shock with an overnight metamorphosis, the relatively static urban architecture nevertheless housed a frenetic circulation of people, goods and changing stimuli that proved bewildering to an undifferentiated mass of youths eager to distinguish themselves.¹¹ The already shaky sense of identity characteristic of adolescence was further challenged in these young men by the perception that France was, in the words of Carolyn J. Dean, “a society overwhelmed by threats to the [individual and collective] body’s health presented by urbanization, democratization, demographic stagnation, military defeat [...] and their perceived symptoms: emasculation, nervousness, weakness, enervation.”¹² In short, the throngs of students who crowded the streets of the Latin Quarter in the 1870s and 1880s were seen as works in progress: a potential source of national revival if properly molded, and a potential threat to national survival if left to their own devices. The *bacheliers* were in crisis, their future as men and as metropolitan subjects at stake.

The *brasserie à femmes* quickly became a shelter and outlet for this troubled “prolétariat de bacheliers.” Much like the *bacheliers* themselves, the *brasserie à femmes* had come of age as the Second Empire waned. Like Zola’s *Nana*, the female-staffed brasserie made its Parisian début during the 1867 Exposition Universelle, a festive celebration of art and industry that coincided with the completion of Haussmann’s *grands travaux*. According to Alfred Carel’s monograph *Les Brasseries à femmes de Paris* (1884), it was here, in an exoticized, amorous simulacrum of national conquest, that “de jolis spécimens des habitantes” from the various countries represented “commencèrent à

¹¹ Here, Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson furnishes an important reminder that “the sense of dislocation focused on the transformations engineered by Haussmann [neither] began [nor] ended with the empire.” Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, *Paris as Revolution: Writing the Nineteenth-Century City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 121. The recognition of Haussmannization as a midpoint rather than an onset of urban renovation is prevalent in recent scholarship. See especially David Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity* (New York and London: Routledge, 2005).

¹² Dean, *The Frail Social Body*, 5.

envahir” the traditionally male-run space of the brasseries.¹³ The job of the young female ambassador of the beer hall was to “attirer la foule” of potential customers to her nation’s booth and to maximize and make pleasurable their consumption of its potables.¹⁴ It proved to be a fruitful marketing strategy, and the licit trade in alcohol quickly became associated with a rather more illicit (and more lucrative) commerce, “celui des femmes” themselves.¹⁵ It became fashionable for young men to come to the fair to “aller à la remonte”: “enlever les filles” from the brasserie, paying a “dédit” or forfeit fee to the proprietor for the privilege of whisking away the *serveuse* (under contract to the establishment) that had captured his fancy. Soon, clever shop runners saw the potential in this venal combination, and before long, the Exposition was the site of a full-fledged “traite de femmes de toutes les couleurs.”¹⁶

Though the brasserie model at the Exposition was initially predicated on the enticingly exotic nature of the *serveuse*, her foreignness quickly became a more overtly cultural accessory, made to order and designed for show: “Les cargaisons exotiques ne pouvant plus arriver assez rapidement, ils allèrent recruter à Belleville, à Ménilmontant ou Batignolles, des Italiennes, des Espagnoles, des Américaines, des Circassiennes, etc., etc. Vite, un changement de costume, et la transformation était complète.”¹⁷ With demand for the *serveuse*’s services outpacing supply, changes were implemented

¹³ Alfred Carel, *Les brasseries à femmes de Paris* (Paris: E. Monnier, 1884), 2–3, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1114210>. Of the nineteenth-century monographs, Carel’s text offers the most expansive and sustained reflection on the *brasserie à femmes* phenomenon. Carel repeatedly employs metaphors of “invasion” to describe the development of the *brasseries à femmes*.

¹⁴ In many cases, the alcohol did not go down easy, as Carel describes; the girls were meant to “faire avaler sans trop de grimaces les plus épouvantables liquides et les ragoûts les plus répugnants.” *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.* In a chapter entitled “Brasserie de femmes,” Jules-Gustave-Ali Coffignon uses similar language to describe the spectrum of *filles* in the Exposition brasseries: “Leur personnel constituait une véritable exposition ethnographique au point de vue féminin. On trouvait là des spécimens de toutes les races et de toutes les nationalités.” *Paris vivant: La Corruption à Paris* (Paris: Librairie illustrée, 1889), 94.

¹⁷ Carel, *Les brasseries à femmes de Paris*, 4. Here, it seems likely that Coffignon has referred (without citation) to Carel’s text in preparing his monograph: “leurs cargaisons exotiques n’arrivant plus assez vite pour répondre aux exigences de la

that would go on to characterize the brasserie in its later, urban incarnations: girls were recruited from the outskirts of Paris, and were dressed up in interchangeable national costumes to play more emphatically the part of the exotic other.¹⁸ This shifted sourcing of the *serveuses*, which allowed brasserie owners to produce capital from within the capital city, would be fundamental in the dissemination of the *brasserie à femmes* after the Exposition closed in November 1867 and beyond its borders at the Champ de Mars.¹⁹

It did not take long for the Exposition's brasserie model to take root in the Latin Quarter, where it quickly found favor with the crowds of adrift, bored *bacheliers*.²⁰ Alternately depicting its proliferation as that of an infectious disease, an insidious plant taking root, or a bestial infestation, contemporary monographs express horror at the brasserie's rapid reproduction, its popularity growing at a stunning rate as it "devint de mode parmi la jeunesse dorée."²¹ Initial apprehension

consummation, ils finirent par trouver plus simple d'aller chercher leurs Italiennes ou leurs Espagnoles aux Batignolles et à Montmartre" (*Paris vivant: La Corruption à Paris*, 94).

¹⁸ In his guidebook to the Exposition Universelle of 1867, Hippolyte Gautier includes a humorous anecdote that corroborates Carel's account of the shift to suburban *serveuses*: "Si vous préférez les usages du Nord, tout près se trouve la *brasserie des Bavaoises* ou la **brasserie bavaoise**, l'un et l'autre peuvent se dire avec autant de raison. Entrez dans ce long parallélogramme: vous voyez d'abord vingt jeunes filles au jupon court, au corsage de velours, à la coiffure fantaisiste, qui s'empressent de vous servir avec une grâce plus que germanique. Le premier consommateur qui entra dans cette brasserie, fut assez réjoui par cette apparition inattendue, il se crut transporté bien loin de Paris, de son bitume et de son langage; il s'empessa de demander une choppe, en prenant l'accent le plus allemand possible: O déception! les Bavaoises parlaient le plus pur français des Batignolles. Le public en prit gaiement son parti, et ne se plaignit pas d'avoir perdu au change: tant il est vrai que si l'habit ne fait pas l'homme, c'est lui qui fait la femme. La brasserie bavaoise est un café chantant, genre de distraction tout à fait moderne, et qui ne pouvait pas ne pas avoir de représentant au Champ de Mars." Hippolyte Gautier, *Les Curiosités de l'Exposition Universelle de 1867* (Paris: Delagrave, 1867), 120. Emphasis original.

¹⁹ In an astute study of representations of brasserie prostitution in Third Republic paintings, Clayson shows that "the rise of the brasserie à femmes is [...] part of the story of shifting sexual demand and supply in the early years of the Third Republic in Paris." Clayson, *Painted Love*, 133–134.

²⁰ On the genesis of the brasserie, including information on daily wages and background of the *serveuses*, see Clayson, *Representations of Prostitution*, 231–238; Clayson, *Painted Love*, 133–142; Alain Corbin, *Les Filles de nocce: Misère sexuelle et prostitution au XIX^e siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 2010), 250–254.

²¹ Carel, *Les brasseries à femmes de Paris*, 4. Of the nineteenth-century accounts of the *brasserie à femmes*, only Maurice Barrès's tells a different origin story. Consistent with his overall project of defending the charms of these brasseries, Barrès credits a certain M.E. Lepelletier, a financially troubled "patron" of "un petit café de la rue de la Banque" and a "père de famille," with the idea of staffing his café with *serveuses* and thus engendering the *brasserie à femmes*, where "toutes les nuances de l'amour libre se sont fondues." Maurice Barrès, *Le quartier latin: ces messieurs, ces dames* (Paris: C. Dalou, 1888), 25–26, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k826880>. Admiring the wily creativity of this "roublard" from Marseille, Barrès also underscores the proliferation of "his" idea, commenting that "on sait combien son innovation fut féconde"

about the *brasserie à femmes* was directed as much toward what it destroyed as the problems it created. The newly female-inflected space co-opted the old boys'-club atmosphere of the traditional, *garçon-*served beer halls, where men had been able to share thoughts (“discuter” and “politiquer”) over bocks and a game of dominoes.²² Opting for the metaphor of infestation, Carel thus stages the brasserie’s taking hold in the Latin Quarter as a hostile, predatory takeover by the evil Second Empire of the homosocial free speech and activism that had flourished in the *brasseries de bière*. “Comme une nuée de sauterelles, les femmes firent irruption dans les cafés du Quartier-Latin qui devint la proie des ‘Grenouilles de brasserie’ encouragées et soutenues par la police impériale.”²³ The *néoréglementariste* claim advanced by Carel – that the authorities were complicit with and even responsible for the clandestine prostitution of the brasseries – was common, with critics decrying the police’s laissez-faire attitude toward these establishments. Indeed, anxieties about the dangers of the *brasserie à femmes* grew in step with the bars themselves, especially after the law of July 17, 1880 “instaurait la liberté du commerce des débits de boissons” and thus tacitly authorized their commerce in sex to remain an open secret.²⁴ Treatises on the brasseries from the 1880s unfailingly manifest dismay and trepidation about the constant growth of the phenomenon that had overtaken the Latin Quarter and spread throughout Paris. Carel notes in 1884 that the establishments “se propagent à l’infini sur la rive gauche [...] Pour une ancienne qui se ferme, dix nouvelles

(Ibid., 26.). Seemingly preferring to attribute this institution – for him, a source of nostalgia – to an authorial father figure, Barrès does not mention the brasseries of the Exposition Universelle. On Barrès’s affinity for fathers, see Surkis, *Sexing the Citizen*, 95–96.

²² Carel, *Les brasseries à femmes de Paris*, 7. The destruction or regendering of the male space of the traditional brasserie was often depicted as the Second Empire’s attempt to stamp out revolutionary sentiment that they feared was brewing in the cafés.

²³ Ibid., 5–6. We may note here the double resonance of the adjective “soutenues,” implying that the police not only supported the brasserie whores but also served as their pimp (*souteneur*). The metaphor that Carel uses here is reminiscent of his aforementioned description of the brasserie’s inception at the Exposition Universelle as an “invasion” by the female workers.

²⁴ Corbin, *Les filles de noce*, 216. The date is corroborated in Coffignon, *Paris vivant: La Corruption à Paris*, 95.

s'ouvrent."²⁵ Gustave Macé, former chief of the Service de la Sûreté, remarks the same year that the *brasseries à femmes* "ont le droit de s'installer partout, et [...] partout s'installent" and "se sont multipliées à l'infini."²⁶ Writing in 1889, Charles Virmaître cites an alarmingly steep increase in the number of brasseries – from 40 establishments employing 125 *filles* in 1872, to 181 "*boîtes*" with 881 *serveuses* in 1882, to 203 brasseries and 1100 waitresses in 1888 – as a sign that strict regulation is urgently needed.²⁷

Much like Huysmans's *des Esseintes*, the brasserie's many nonfictional critics consistently delineate their position through comparison of the *brasserie à femmes* to the *maison de tolérance*. Dr. L. Reuss, for example, asserts that the beer hall presents "bien plus de danger au point de vue de la morale et de la santé publique que les maisons de tolérance,"²⁸ and Macé similarly finds them "bien plus dangereux que les maisons de tolérance, parce que la débauche y est la même, avec les garanties de cette dernière en moins."²⁹ In his impassioned defense of the then-demodé tolerated brothel as a controllable, manageable solution to the prostitutional problem of the Latin Quarter, their contemporary Virmaître summarizes the principal arguments deployed against the *brasserie à femmes*:

Pourquoi tolérer les *brasseries de femmes*, qui ne sont que des lieux publics où, sous les yeux de l'autorité, s'alcoolisent et se pourrissent les jeunes gens qui les fréquentent? [...] Les *brasseries de femmes* sont libres, n'importe qui peut en ouvrir une; depuis la loi du 18 juillet 1881 qui abroge le décret du 29 décembre 1851, aucun règlement n'est imposé aux tenanciers de ces boîtes vénériennes; ils peuvent choisir leur personnel à leur guise, sans contrôle, mineures,

²⁵ Carel, *Les brasseries à femmes de Paris*, 15.

²⁶ Gustave Macé, *La Police parisienne: Le service de la Sûreté* (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1885), 219, 229.

²⁷ Virmaître, *Trottoirs et lupanars*, 273. Coffignon has done his own research on the subject, citing a need resulting from police ineptitude: "L'absence de documents sérieux à cet égard dans les divers services de la Préfecture de police, est un indice de relâchement fâcheux dans la surveillance de ces établissements. [...] J'ai dû prendre l'initiative de ce travail que je considère comme très consciencieusement exécuté et scrupuleusement exact." His estimate, which covers only 1888, differs slightly from Virmaître's, finding a total of "224 brasseries desservies par 1,655 filles." Coffignon, *Paris vivant: La Corruption à Paris*, 96.

²⁸ Dr. L[ouis] Reuss, *La Prostitution au point de vue de l'hygiène et de l'administration, en France et à l'étranger* (Paris: J.-B. Baillière et fils, 1889), 197.

²⁹ Macé, *La Police parisienne: Le service de la Sûreté*, 219.

filles mariées, filles en carte et filles voleuses. Rien ne les trouble, la prostitution y est cependant avérée, patente, indéniable.³⁰

These “brasseries-bordels”³¹ – “établissements immondes” and “lieux de débauche”³² – are an undefined and unregulated space of troubling hybridity, combining brasserie and brothel, the commerce in alcohol and the commerce in sex, blatant and clandestine prostitution by assorted *filles*, minors and wives. Unlike the reassuringly hermetic and singly-purposed *maison close*, the brasserie was characterized by openness and freedom: opened by all, open to all.³³ *Serveuses* had existed in Parisian bars prior to 1867, but as Carel remarks, these *caboulots* differed from the *brasseries à femmes* in that “la vertu de ces demoiselles était sauvegardée par un épais et infranchissable comptoir.” The “bachelière-ès-bocks”³⁴ had no such boundary, her movement unrestricted as she consumed food and drink alongside her client in his *banquette*.³⁵ Whereas the *filles de maison* of the *tolérance* were closely monitored and only rarely allowed to leave the premises, the *serveuse* moved freely, able to leave with the highest bidder at the end of her shift to do her more insidious business elsewhere.³⁶ If the *maisons de tolérance* were, as Virmaître so vehemently contends, a “mal nécessaire” in a system that was predicated upon the classification and categorization of prostitution as a means of control, the *brasseries à femmes* were simply an unknowable and uncontainable urban “mal,” one that needed to be

³⁰ Virmaître, *Trottoirs et lupanars*, 7–8. Virmaître mistakenly dates the law of July 17, 1880 a year later. The opening pages of *Trottoirs*, itself the thirteenth volume of a series of texts by Virmaître entitled *Paris Documentaire*, promise a tome “à paraître” entitled *Paris-Brasserie*; unfortunately, the text was never published.

³¹ Ibid., 8.

³² Macé, *La Police parisienne: Le service de la Sûreté*, 212, 219.

³³ Dr. Reuss repeatedly calls the *brasseries à femmes* “de véritables maisons de passe et de prostitution;” here, the distinction between the regulated *maison de tolérance* and the clandestine *maison de passe* is critical. Reuss, *La prostitution*, 194.

³⁴ “Suppression Des Filles de Brasserie,” *La Bavarde*, April 6, 1882.

³⁵ Carel, *Les brasseries à femmes de Paris*, 3.

³⁶ Coffignon specifies that they were only free to leave in accordance with their scheduled shifts; if a *fille* failed to show up for work, she was “frappée d’une amende qu’elle doit acquitter pour rentrer dans la brasserie.” Coffignon, *Paris vivant: La Corruption à Paris*, 98.

delineated and eradicated.³⁷ Haussmann's orderly architecture of control, which he had so aggressively traced onto the city space, had ironically engendered a new breed of urban disorder.

Metropolitan Maturation

Paris's *arrivistes*, as Christopher Prendergast has argued with respect to Balzac, must "negotiate a deep anxiety with regard to the mapping, the 'legibility', of the social landscape of the modern city."³⁸ In the eyes of fin-de-siècle readers such as Barrès, the cartographic and semiotic crisis that inheres in Balzac's Paris is surmountable for those, like Eugène de Rastignac, who are able to become strong urban readers. The confrontational cry – "À nous deux maintenant!" – that so famously symbolizes and records Rastignac's ascent to Parisian relevance from the heights of the Père-Lachaise cemetery at the end of *Le Père Goriot* (1835) is predicated upon an opposition: Rastignac versus Paris, *l'homme* separate from and facing *la ville*. He has not been appropriated by the city; he is able to regard it from a space of critical distance, which allows him to read, learn, and master its social codes. This Balzacian heroism, which would be admired, parodied and imitated throughout the century, in fiction and in life, is a triumphant mastery of reading as a practice of spatiotemporal authority. Implied in this paradigm is the notion that Paris is a legible, self-contained text and that the ability to decipher it is a mark of distinction, an idea corroborated many years later by one of Barrès's *déracinés*: "– Tout le monde peut voir un spectacle parisien, mais encore faut-il savoir le lire, continua Renaudin, du ton dédaigneux d'un 'Parisien' qui rentre dans son village" (*D*

³⁷ Here Virmaître's argument parallels the one advanced by the *réglementaristes*, beginning with Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet's *De la prostitution dans la ville de Paris* in 1836 and continued throughout the century. Though relatively rare, the *brasserie à femmes* did have its defenders; I address this side of the debate in my discussion of Maurice Barrès later in this chapter.

³⁸ Christopher Prendergast, *The Order of Mimesis: Balzac, Stendhal, Nerval, Flaubert* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 93.

141). The irony is that Renaudin, of course, is not among the privileged few who are in the know; the young *Lorrain* has only been in Paris for a few days.

Paradoxically, most of the aspirational Rastignacs who seek to follow in his footsteps in post-Haussmannian Paris are likewise guilty of dire misreadings. The massive overhaul undergone by the city, along with the dizzying circulation characteristic of modernity, lead to the sense that Paris is no longer a ready-made map but rather a city-in-the-making. For its inhabitants, fin-de-siècle Paris is not a readerly text, to borrow Roland Barthes's terms, but a writerly one in which the semiotic crisis adduced by Prendergast becomes coextensive with a personal crisis of signification, calling into question the sense of self as sign and generator of meaning. Third-Republic Parisians must learn not only to read the city passively; they must do so while mastering it by leaving their mark. Deprived of the vertical separation that rendered the urban space legible, they are what Michel de Certeau denotes "marcheurs [...] dont le corps obéit aux pleins et aux déliés d'un texte urbain qu'ils écrivent sans pouvoir le lire."³⁹ Their impossible desire to be "mise en carte," to leave their trace on the continually rewritten metropolitan map, effectuates an inversion of the prostitutional hierarchy; in the relative freedom of the *brasserie à femmes*, the only *carte* that registers the *fille's* venal body is the brasserie's menu of services.⁴⁰

Les Déracinés, the first volume of Barrès's trilogy *Le Roman de l'énergie nationale* (1897-1902), recounts the vicissitudes in the capital city of a group of seven young men from the provinces with grand desires and a predilection for the brasseries of the Quartier latin, the urban substitute for their provincial classroom. With outsized hopes of conquest, achievement and protagonism instilled by the impassioned, idealistic diatribes of their teacher, Bouteiller, the *Lorrains* arrive in Paris in 1883

³⁹ Michel de Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien, 1. Arts de faire*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 141.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 150.

and make their way with varying degrees of success.⁴¹ While François Sturel, the most literary and introspective of Barrès's seven uprooted *Lorrains* and an explicitly declared descendant of Rastignac, desires nothing less than to “dominer les hommes et caresser les femmes,” the least privileged *déraciné*, Honoré Racadot, has perhaps the grandest urban ambitions of the *bacheliers* (D 147).⁴² Fueled by his relationship with La Léontine, an especially ugly woman that he has fallen for and installed in a position of “demi-prostitution” at a third-rate brasserie, and with help from Mouchefrin, his fellow economic outsider, and the rest of the group, Racadot takes over the struggling newspaper *La Vraie République* in the hopes that by “ajout[ant] à la masse des imprimés” he will acquire a voice in the Parisian life of letters and move onto ever loftier ambitions (D 309). The earnest but parodic descendant of Rastignac and Lucien de Rubempré, the aspiring journalist and writer of Balzac's *Illusions perdues* (1836-1843), Racadot comes to embody Barrès's vision of a typical young *bachelier* deformed by a faulty French educational system. As the narrator avows with a good deal of irony: “Tous les jeunes Français, dans les lycées, sont dressés pour faire des hommes de lettres parisiens. C'est l'affirmation de leur virilité totale” (D 309).

Though Barrès finds the state to blame for these men coming to Paris and being “uprooted” from their native lands by delusions of individual grandeur, and though he finds the *brasserie à femmes* to be a haven of anomie-curing sociability, it is ironically the false sense of identity and efficacy engendered by brasserie relations that will catalyze Racadot's attempted ascent to relevance and his inevitable descent to ruin. Throughout the novel, Racadot's partnership with La Léontine is depicted as a source of virile confidence that fuels his fiscal and authorial ambitions. For Racadot and Mouchefrin, the most disoriented of the *déracinés* upon arrival in the city where money is everywhere but in their pockets, the brasserie becomes the space that nourishes their confidence and gives them

⁴¹ Their stories are continued in the other two novels of the series: *L'Appel au Soldat* (1900) and *Leurs figures* (1902).

⁴² On the intertextuality with Balzac and *Les Déracinés* as a novel of formation, see François Proulx, *Victims of the Book: Reading Anxieties in the French Novel of Formation, 1880-1914* (PhD diss., Harvard University, 2010).

a sense of agency: “Ils retrouvèrent leur supériorité lorsqu’on parcourut les brasseries de femmes, fort à la mode au quartier Latin [...] Racadot et Mouchefrin [...] y trouvent leur palais. C’est l’instinct des noyés que, sur l’océan social, s’accrochent les uns aux autres pour essayer de se sauver; mais c’est aussi l’instinct d’exilés qui se reconnaissent et bivouaquent fraternellement” (*D* 137, 184). The sense of superiority that Racadot feels in a brasserie “de dernier ordre” generates an interstice between his present and his imagined future that he does not have the means to bridge. While, as a young man, “l’homme ne s’est pas encore fait la vie qu’il mérite,” the Barrèsian narrator tells us, and thus “les années de la première jeunesse, dans les villes du moins, sont laides,” it is nevertheless “seulement dans les romans historiques qu’un personnage se fixe un rôle auquel il se conforme petit à petit” (*D* 183, 186). According to the Barrèsian model, it is acceptable to wile away the ugly, equivocal years of youth in the company of beautiful (or ugly) women in the brasserie – despite the false sentiment and unproductive diversions – but illusion is a sign of weakness when involving the belief in an outmoded path to Parisian success.

Nevertheless, and perhaps unsurprisingly, this is exactly what Racadot and Mouchefrin attempt to do through imitation of an historic (i.e., past) novelistic paradigm. Retelling a Balzacian plot in microcosm, Racadot reassures Mouchefrin that they will beat the odds and make it in Paris:

Nous ne sommes pas assez riches pour les moyens réguliers: il faut que nous recueillions notre énergie et que nous lui trouvions une courte voie. Tu souffres de ton dénuement? Il y a beaucoup de puissants qui à nos âges étaient méprisés et qui, dix années plus tard, assez jeunes encore pour jouir, avaient de l’argent, des maîtresses au théâtre, des habits à détruire, des poignées de main sur tous les boulevards, et qui payaient au restaurant sans même vérifier la note. Je te dis cela dans le détail banal... (*D* 217).

Though Racadot has openly mocked the would-be modern Rastignacs earlier in the narrative, here he redeploys the same plot without irony; the desire to believe in the possibility of urban ascendancy is powerful indeed. The sonic resonance between “dénuement” (destitution) and “dénouement” (the outcome or conclusion of a story) is suggestive of the narrativization implicit in Racadot’s

pronouncement. By posing the question, Racadot indicates a belief in the possibility of changing their ending to better match that of Balzac's social climbers. He is reading the city through the lens of the brasserie, where he and Moucheffrin can be "superior" because Racadot is not only La Léontine's *amant de cœur* but also her *souteneur* ("Le dénué Racadot recourut très vite à l'expédient de placer sa Léontine dans un de ces établissements [...] désireux de constituer une clientèle à sa maîtresse") (*D* 181). And yet the question will prove to be rhetorical: largely because of their *dénouement*, both Racadot and Moucheffrin will indeed suffer from their *dénouement*. In hoping otherwise, they are attempting to read the city by superposing upon it an outdated code. Financially devastated by *La Vraie République*, Racadot will end up murdering Sturel's mistress Astiné Aravan after extorting her for money, and then being executed for his crime. "Cette brasserie décriée, rue de l'École-de-Médecine," in other words, "n'est point la chambre glacée des héros de Balzac" (*D* 186). The narrator knows this, but Racadot cannot read the difference.

Despite Barrès's mockery of those who would imitate the outmoded Rastignac model so many years, regimes and mimetic iterations later, and despite his decrimal of "la contagion des Rastignac," he intimates that the young men of the Latin Quarter – for whose missteps and exploits he expresses a nostalgic fondness – still subscribe and aspire to this paradigm.⁴³ In a century marked by the repeated loss of fatherly figures, it seems, Balzac was an especially difficult textual father to disown. Barrès makes the comparison explicit in *Sous l'œil des barbares* (1888; published the same year as *Le Quartier latin*) when the hero refers to those who dream of living "la vie facile" as "jeunes gens de brasserie et autres Rastignacs."⁴⁴ Barrès's own brasserie-frequenting protagonists get into trouble not because they buy into a brasserie girl's story – Barrès divests the *filles de brasserie* of any voice or

⁴³ *Le Voltaire*, 28 juin 1887. Quoted in Vital Rambaud, "Barrès et Balzac," *L'Année balzacienne* 12 (1991): 395.

⁴⁴ Maurice Barrès, *Le Culte du moi; Sous l'œil des barbares* (Paris: Plon, 1922), 92. Indeed, as Jean Borie has justly observed with regard to *Les Déracinés*, "la quasi-totalité de son cadre et de son monde" come from Balzac. Jean Borie, "Préface," in *Les Déracinés*, by Maurice Barrès (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 28.

influence beyond an attractive figure, mindless conversation, and a bit of “pitié utile” – but because they so easily dominate the social scene of the brasserie that they buy into the Balzacian model and attempt to reincarnate not only Rastignac, but Balzac himself.

Nine years before the publication of *Les Déracinés*, Barrès had published a monograph entitled *Le Quartier latin: Ces messieurs, ces dames* (1888), an ode to the charms of the *brasserie à femmes* “écrit pour mes fils quand ils auront vingt ans.” Unlike his contemporaries, who consider the brasseries so many “écoles du vice,” and despite the problems his brasserie-loving protagonists encounter (which he blames on the state), Barrès seeks to vindicate and rehabilitate the image of the *brasserie à femmes* as a harmless escape from the rather unpleasant Parisian life and surroundings of the *bacheliers*.⁴⁵ Though the *bachelier* enjoys practical freedoms in the city, these come at a significant personal price, leaving him atomized and alone even – and especially – amidst the Parisian crowds. As Georg Simmel notes, “the bodily closeness and lack of space make intellectual distance really perceivable for the first time. [...] One never feels as lonely and as deserted as in this metropolitan crush of persons.”⁴⁶ Barrès concurs, writing that “le sentiment de l’isolement, voilà toute l’explication de la vie au quartier latin, le malaise qu’adouçissent les brasseries.”⁴⁷ Despite the general perception that these “petits crevés de l’époque” were disconnected and weakened by their urban environment and needed to be reinvigorated and revirilized, Barrès believed the *bachelier* to be endowed with a “belle fougue de sens et de sentiment” but deprived of any reasonable means to

⁴⁵ Marie François Goron, *L’Amour à Paris: Le Marché aux femmes* (Paris: E. Flammarion, 1899). Like Gustave Macé, Goron is an “ancien chef de la Sûreté.” As Alain Corbin writes, “La ‘brasserie à femmes’ a incontestablement facilité l’identification du groupe ainsi que l’intégration de la jeunesse provinciale à la société parisienne.” Corbin, *Les filles de noce*, 252.

⁴⁶ Georg Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” in *On Individuality and Social Forms* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1972), 334.

⁴⁷ Barrès, *Le quartier latin*, 32. Barrès’s monograph is a nostalgic defense of the *brasserie à femmes* “écrite pour mes fils quand ils auront vingt ans.” He would later reproduce much of the text from the monograph for *Les Déracinés*, with only minor changes.

satisfy it.⁴⁸ In search of an outlet for their youthful enthusiasm – not to be found in the depersonalized encounters of the city streets – the young men headed in droves to the *brasserie à femmes*, “médiocre salon de flirtage assurément, mais que l’heureux estomac et l’imagination de la vingtième année arrivent à rendre délicieuse, parce qu’elle est la satisfaction d’un besoin sensuel et sentimental.”⁴⁹ In the codified *brassage* of the brasserie, the *bachelier* could let down his metropolitan “reserve” (that Simmelian organ of “concealed aversion” and “self-preservation in the face of the great city”) and open up his inner life to the types of intense, emotional reactions that would be soul-crushing if practiced everywhere in the capital.⁵⁰ It was at once appropriate and potentially quite perilous, then, that it should be “dans les brasseries alors en pleine vogue [que] ces jeunes [...] se formèrent à la vie” (*D* 180). Their bodies and minds soft and malleable, subject to youthful overexcitation, they were capable of being shaped into functional men by the hand of authority, but equally susceptible to being malformed and misdirected by the body of the whore.

The *bacheliers* congregated at the brasserie’s tables in search of some tenuous sense of belonging: to their peer group, to their city, to their era. As such, the flourishing of the brasserie attests a shift from the *filles inscrites* of reglemented prostitution to a different breed of inscription: an aspiration on the part of the male clients to *s’inscrire*, “laisser une empreinte indélébile,” by being a part of some social body (*s’inscrire* also meaning to join a group, such as the army).⁵¹ It is in the

⁴⁸ Coffignon, *Paris vivant: La Corruption à Paris*, 94; Maurice Barrès, *Les déracinés*, ed. Jean-Michel Wittmann and Emmanuel Godo (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2004), 183. All references are to this edition and will be noted parenthetically (as *D*) in the text.

⁴⁹ Barrès, *Le quartier latin*, 34.

⁵⁰ Simmel, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” 332, 331. Though the brasserie takes its name from the process of beer brewing, that the word *brassage* also signifies an intermingling of people or a mixing of ideas resonates with the fin-de-siècle *brasserie à femmes*.

⁵¹ The definition is from the *Trésor de la langue française informatisé*, which also tells us that “L’accent est mis sur l’action d’enregistrer quelque chose, sur la volonté de garder la trace de quelque chose.” Extrapolating from this notion of an army-like brasserie brotherhood, and remembering that the *fille de brasserie*’s job is primarily to sell alcohol, it is hardly a stretch to consider the brasserie *serveuse* as a modern descendant of the *vivandières* and *cantinières* that traveled with the French army.

brasserie à femmes, which combines the congenial male socialization of the traditional brasserie with the titillating pleasures of the brothel, that they seek to satisfy what Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick identifies as “a desire to consolidate partnership with authoritative males in and through the bodies of females.”⁵² In Barrès’s romantic, idealized view, the *fille de brasserie* contributes to the formation of solid men and citizens; her role as the pleurably observable other allows them to “consolidate partnership” unproblematically around her body and thus engender some *esprit de corps*. For Barrès, the passage through the brasserie – unthreatening because it is just a phase – offers not only a sentimental education but indeed “une école de civilisation” (D 183).⁵³ The *fille de brasserie*, largely stripped of her sexual activity in his descriptions, thus takes her place in a long literary line of “jeunes amies” and “civilizing” *filles* that have made the Latin Quarter a mythic symbol of naïve, youthful ardor and “le lieu où naît l’âme de demain.”⁵⁴ Barrès goes so far as to proclaim that the *brasserie à femmes* is not only an “institution très utile” but indeed “le seul admissible” of all cafés offering temporary shelter to young men desperate to escape “l’horreur du chez soi” because it “leur procure le sensualisme le moins grossier.”⁵⁵ Once again judging the bar by aesthetic standards and situating it in the Latin Quarter’s rich intellectual history, he proclaims it to be preferable to the brothel because the brasserie “est très réellement un salon.”⁵⁶ For Barrès, the *fille de brasserie* offers a

⁵² Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 38.

⁵³ Barrès famously blames the French educational system for the nation’s ills, indicating that it has lead to what he calls in *Les Déracinés* a “France dissociée et décérébrée.” The problematic political and nationalist project at the heart of Barrès’s work is outside the scope of this analysis and has been convincingly analyzed elsewhere, and so I will not address it here. On *Les Déracinés* as a *roman à thèse*, for instance, see Susan R. Suleiman, *Authoritarian Fictions: The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1993), 118–132.

⁵⁴ Though Barrès mockingly admits that the contemporary “simili-gommeux [qui] s’attablent dans des brasseries” hardly seem worthy of “cette place qu’immortalisa Héloïse avec Abélard,” he believes that future Frenchmen will look back on the brasserie era with the same fondness with which his peers regard past iterations of the *Quartier latin* life. Barrès, *Le quartier latin*, 5.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 29; Barrès, *Les déracinés*, 180.

⁵⁶ Barrès, *Le quartier latin*, 27.

novel way for these *bacheliers* to live their own “novel of formation” in microcosm by promising them a sentimental education to match their academic one and bridging the intellectual gap between beings with her physical and sensual pleasures.

From *Racoleuse* to *Raconteuse*

Standing between adolescence and adulthood, the Second Empire and the Third Republic, the provinces and the capital, and the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the fin-de-siècle *bachelier* occupied a liminal place. “Ces demi-mâles, ou plutôt ces molles créatures,” as Barrès calls them, standing hopeful on the metaphoric brink of sexual, subjective and urban maturity, looked to the *filles de brasserie* as their conduit across the threshold to manhood and mastery (*D* 133-134). It is along these lines that I would like to return to Sedgwick’s formulation of male sociability and suggest that the “partnership with authoritative males” that the *bachelier* seeks to achieve through brasserie socialization is, in fact, twofold, and in both cases has little to do with establishing brotherly bonds with his peers. Rather, the *brasserie à femmes* is the site of both the *bachelier*’s self-projection into functional and virile adulthood – a partnership with his future self – and the desired communion with the “authoritative” male heroes of Balzacian urban narratives, a fusion that would inscribe him into the time of history by granting him Parisian protagonism and authorship. Both passages are articulated through the metaphor – etymologically, the mode of transport – of the prostitute’s body. The brasserie thus embodies the Bakhtinian chronotope of the threshold, the space and time through which the *bachelier* must travel in order to pass from adolescence to adulthood:

The chronotope of *threshold* [...] can be combined with the motif of encounter, but its most fundamental instance is as the chronotope of *crisis* and *break* in a life. The word ‘threshold’ itself already has a metaphorical meaning in everyday usage (together with its literal meaning), and is connected with the breaking point of a life, the moment of crisis, the decision that changes a life (or the indecisiveness that fails to change a life, the fear to step over the threshold). In literature, the chronotope of the threshold is always metaphorical and symbolic [of the] places where crisis events occur, the falls, resurrections, renewals, epiphanies, decisions that determine the whole life of a man. In this chronotope, time is

essentially instantaneous; it is as if it has no duration and falls out of the normal course of biographical time.⁵⁷

Clearly, the notion of the prostitudinal encounter as threshold, as a critical rite of passage in the life of a young man, is neither new to the Third Republic nor limited to the *brasserie à femmes*. As we saw in Chapter One, recognition of the indispensable, or at least often unavoidable, nature of prostitudinal relations led to the *réglementariste* policies of the early- to mid-nineteenth century, which sought to contain and control the exercise of prostitution to the authorized brothels and thus eliminate its primary moral and hygienic dangers. Whereas *maison* prostitution offered the concrete clarity of a sexual coming-of-age mediated by the prostitute's body, however, the *brasserie à femmes* is marked by an equivocal hybridity. Its rite of passage was not only sexual – indeed, the sexual communion was not always assured – but also literary and sentimental, and thus precariously dependent on the prostitute's unruly and often simulated desire. In the *brasserie*, it is not the prostitute's body that bridges the gap between the starting point and the goal of manhood and urban mastery, but rather the narrative she engenders by sustaining the “instantaneous time” of the encounter – and here again, we might think of the most famously ephemeral of urban encounters, the one memorialized in Baudelaire's “À une passante” – into the “dilatory space” of narrative.⁵⁸

Before we turn to our analysis of the *fille de brasserie*'s writerly role, a caveat: admittedly, not every client of the *brasserie à femmes* took his seat at a *serveuse*'s table in search of a story. Considered by its supporters as a space of “utilité publique,” the *brasserie* offered the potential satisfaction of various desires for various consumers. Many were simply Barrèsian *vadrouilleurs*, anxious to escape for an evening with friends, socialize over a few beers, and “fumer [leur] cigare en regardant rôder

⁵⁷ M. M. Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 248.

⁵⁸ I take the notion of “dilatory space” from Peter Brooks, who is quoting Roland Barthes.

une créature qui a pour métier de plaire.”⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the notion that there has been a displacement from the purely physical pleasures of the tolerated brothel or the *maison de rendez-vous* to a mental or ego-driven stimulation based on sentimental pursuits is pervasive, even obsessive, among observers of the brasserie. As witnessed by the contemporary writings of Huysmans, Barrès, Virmaître, Macé, Goron and others, the idea that a fiction of mutual desire lies at the origin of the beer hall’s immense popularity is sufficiently etched into the literary and journalistic imaginary so as to warrant further examination of the source and contours of this narrative supplement to sex. Writing in 1890, Jules Davray formulates this “brasserie problem” in rather suggestive terms: “le danger le plus grand que constituent selon nous, les brasseries à femmes, c’est de favoriser le développement de la prostitution *antiphysique*.”⁶⁰ Davray’s comment – referring to the brasserie’s perceived tendency to incite lesbianism among its *filles*, and evoking a more general practice of ‘antiphysical’ prostitution – is provocative; the *brasserie à femmes* perturbed and goaded so many observers precisely because its practices were considered “against nature,”⁶¹ insofar as they were not purely physical. Displaced from the domain of the corporeal and thus the visible, brasserie prostitution comes to usurp not only legal but literary authority; the *fille de brasserie*’s stationary body is possessable, but her mobile mind is not. More dangerous than the streetwalking *racolense*’s wandering body, it seems, is the wandering mind and mouth of the *raconteuse*, the *fille de brasserie*. Her powerfully incendiary plot poses a menace that extends not only to her clients, but threatens to contaminate the authors that would seek to inscribe her, “bind her mobile energies,” in narrative.⁶²

⁵⁹ Barrès, *Le quartier latin*, 27. The same sentence appears in *Les Déracinés*, with “vaguer” replacing “rôder” and “objet” replacing “métier.”

⁶⁰ Jules Davray, *L’Amour à Paris* (Paris: Ferreyrol, 1890), 109.

⁶¹ *Against Nature* is a common English translation of Huysmans’s *À Rebours*.

⁶² I borrow the notion of plot as a binder of energies from Peter Brooks. Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 100.

Storyteller, Story Seller: Narrating Desire

As we have seen, the scope of anxieties surrounding the brasserie exceeds their sheer numbers. The “brasserie problem” was not merely quantitative, but also qualitative, and piqued latent concerns about the future of France’s susceptible young men. In contrast to other forms of prostitution, where Georg Simmel tells us “the contribution of the woman is infinitely more personal, more substantial, and more ego-involving than the man’s,” brasserie dynamics were fueled by the reciprocal implication of the male ego.⁶³ This was, of course, thought to be especially risky, given the fragile state of France’s young men in the late century. As countless stories didactically recounted in the treatises attest, brasserie prostitution was considered especially “dissolvante” and “pernicieuse” because of its crafty dissimulation of its sexual and economic reality behind a simulation of sentimentality, which took advantage of the weak, sensitive *bachelier*.⁶⁴ Here, a representative example from Gustave Macé:

Un sieur A..., âge de 19 ans, fils d’un grand constructeur, faisait ses études pour être ingénieur. C’était un élève intelligent, studieux et d’une conduite fort régulière. Un soir, un camarade le mena dans une brasserie à femmes: il y revint seul le lendemain, et, à partir de ce moment, sa conduite changea complètement.

Une drôlesse, qui servait dans la brasserie, devinant la naïveté et l’inexpérience du jeune homme, avait forgé et débité une histoire dont elle se disait l’héroïne. Spoliée de sa fortune, elle avait dû, pour vivre, accepter une place de servante de brasserie. Elle s’empressait d’ajouter qu’elle y était depuis peu, que cette vie ‘l’écœurerait’ et que, si on la voyait parfois boire outre mesure, c’était pour chercher l’oubli.

Le jeune A... devint éperdûment (*sic*) amoureux d’elle. Malgré les sages exhortations de son père et celles de sa mère, alors mourante, il quitta l’étude et alla se cacher dans un garni, sous un faux nom, en compagnie de la fille qui l’avait débauché.⁶⁵

Unsurprisingly, the story does not end well. After attempting to steal money from his father to support his *collage*, Le jeune A... unsuccessfully tries to kill himself rather than be forced to abandon

⁶³ Georg Simmel, “Prostitution,” in *On Individuality and Social Forms* (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1972), 125.

⁶⁴ Carel, *Les brasseries à femmes de Paris*, 1.

⁶⁵ Macé, *La Police parisienne: Le service de la Sureté*, 225–226.

“celle qui était enceinte de ses œuvres” (of course, it was “inutile d’ajouter que la grossesse était simulée”).⁶⁶ The moral? “Sans la fille de brasserie en question, ce jeune homme serait probablement aujourd’hui un ingénieur distingué: il porte la casaque du forçat.”⁶⁷ Like so many of his brothers, the *bachelier* in question has fallen prey to the disorder of the brasserie girl’s tripartite “plotting.” Spatially understood, she drags him around behind her, plotting his course and delimiting his potential mobility; her plotting is also seen as maliciously deceptive, in that she feigns a pitiable backstory and a false pregnancy. Her most significant “plotting,” however, is narratological. As Carel indicates, the brasserie’s clients are seen as heartlessly victimized and devirilized by greedy *serveuses*, who stage a fictional narrative that lures them off-course: “Il est pénible de voir ces jeunes hommes aux joues pâles, aux traits émaciés, se laisser traîner comme des bêtes curieuses de brasserie en brasserie par des *grues* sans cœur, qui se jouent de leur avenir.”⁶⁸ The *fille de brasserie* does not merely lie to her client in order to achieve her goal; to fulfill her multiple commercial functions and bring profit to herself and her establishment, she must extend his desire through the “dilatory space” of a linear narrative by projecting a fiction of her own desire as its dénouement. “Pleine de ses œuvres,” regardless of the falsity of the claim, she is imbued with fiction.

Such a practitioner of fictional plotting is Alphonsine Dupont, the protagonist of Adolphe Tabarant’s naturalist novel *Virus d’amour* (1886). At first glance, the novel reads like any of the myriad tales of prostitution from the 1880s that rehearse the tropes and follow in the footsteps of Émile Zola’s *Nana*.⁶⁹ And indeed, Alphonsine, the twenty-year-old, gluttonous, alcoholic, self-

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ The formulation of the brasserie whore’s role recalls the destructive influence of Vautrin on Lucien in Balzac’s *Illusions perdues* and *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*. Significantly, Rastignac – Balzac’s other celebrated *arriviste*, to whom we will return shortly – spurns Vautrin’s overtures in *Le Père Goriot* and achieves a much better ending.

⁶⁸ Carel, *Les brasseries à femmes de Paris*, 18.

⁶⁹ Adolphe Tabarant, *Virus d’amour*, in *Un Joli monde: Romans de la prostitution*, ed. Daniel Grojnowski and Mireille Dottin-Orsini, Bouquins (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2008), 473–594. Hereafter cited in text. Tabarant is much better known today for his art criticism, and particularly his work on Manet. The novel, which has received almost no critical attention, was

indulgent protagonist, shares much in common with her prostitutional progenitors.⁷⁰ Tired of the repetitive boredom of her provincial upbringing and ill-suited to domestic life, she arrives in the capital, finds work as a *couturière*, and soon makes her Parisian “début” at Bullier, a debaucherous *bal de barrière*.⁷¹ Seduced at the dance by Garnot, a young medical student armed with vanilla ice cream and petits-fours, she immediately installs herself in a “*collage*” with him in an “illusion d’un premier amour” in the Latin Quarter. Bored with her lover, desperate for money to feed her *gourmandise* (“sa corde sensible”), and nourished, as we find out much later, by a steady diet of “romans bêtes” that give her “illusions de fillette,” she leaves her first *collage* to go pour bocks at the brasserie: first, the *Amours*, and then the *Cœur-Chaud* (478, 509). After contracting syphilis from an unknown customer, Alphonsine accuses a fellow barmaid, Adrienne, of spreading news of her disease to potential clients. When she drunkenly slaps her loose-lipped coworker after a New Year’s Eve party, Alphonsine is unceremoniously kicked out of the brasserie. In denial about the seriousness of her disease and forced to resort to street prostitution to cover her mounting debts, she becomes increasingly miserable, finally agrees to go to the hospital to treat her disease, and briefly convalesces before

long out of print before being republished in this volume from the “Bouquins” collection. Both Huysmans and Zola were aware of the novel at the time of its release, though Tabarant published it in Belgium with Henry Kistemæckers (as Huysmans had *Marthe*). Zola writes to Tabarant on July 29, 1886, to congratulate him on the novel’s publication, praising him implicitly by criticizing the decadent trends that he resists (here, it is not a stretch to imagine that Zola is referring to *À Rebours*): “Je suis avec la descendance de Flaubert pour la solidité, la clarté et la perfection; je hais les tortilleurs de phrases, les incorrects, les inventeurs de mots inutiles. Tout ce galimatias de la jeunesse dite décadente me dégoûte.” Émile Zola, *Correspondance*, ed. Bard H. Bakker and Colette Becker, vol. V: 1884–1886 (Montréal: Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 1995), 421. Huysmans refers to the novel only elliptically, in an 1891 interview from *L’Écho de Paris* in which he declares that naturalism is dead, as “le roman de la syphilis.” J.-K. Huysmans, *Interviews*, ed. Jean-Marie Seillan (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2002), 100.

⁷⁰ The name “Alphonsine” resonates with various familiar figures from the prostitutional imaginary of the nineteenth century. Alphonsine Plessis is the birth name of Marie Duplessis, *courtisane* and inspiration for the character of Marguerite Gautier in Alexandre Dumas fils’s *La Dame aux camélias*. Published one year after *Virius d’amour*, Adolphe Belot’s novel *Alphonsine* (1887) tells us that an “Alphonsine” is the female version of an “Alphonse,” “un homme qui reçoit de l’argent de la femme avec laquelle il vit [qui vit] elle-même aux dépens d’un ou de plusieurs amants” (4). This sense of “Alphonse” is attested in Rigaud’s *Dictionnaire de l’argot moderne* (1881) as dating from 1860.

⁷¹ If naturalist novels are any indication, the *bal de barrière* seems to tease out every shy provincial girl’s inner whore. See, for instance, Edmond and Jules de Goncourt’s *Germinie Lacerteux* (1865). Bullier in particular is a stop on Nana’s urban itinerary with Satin, who also has a past as a *fillette de brasserie* (only briefly adumbrated in Zola’s novel).

returning home to the provinces to die a grotesque, explicit death. In short, as Caroline de Mulder writes, “Tabarant développe, sur plus de 300 pages, les derniers paragraphes de *Nana*.”⁷²

Alphonsine’s trajectory resonates not only with other naturalist fictions of prostitution but with the path of the young men who constitute the brasserie’s clientele, such as Barrès’s *Racadot*. If a *bachelier* who comes to Paris full of aspirations seeks shelter in the brasserie à femmes when he feels “déraciné,” perhaps it should come as little surprise that young Alphonsine becomes a brasserie *serveuse* when the “cohue braillarde” of Paris initially leaves her “dépaylée” (479). Two sides of the same venal coin, the *bachelier* and the *fille de brasserie* are mutually dependent and share similar ambitions; both see the beer hall as a temporary stop, a threshold on the way to a grander horizon. For him, it is an “utile” and “agréable” diversion that offers a familiar space within an alienating place; for her, a relatively non-taxing means to a lucrative end that will allow her to leave and settle down with an *amant de cœur* when she has had her fill of the bar scene.⁷³ That this anticipatory mapping of a non-contingent future is feasible distinguishes Alphonsine and her colleagues from other contemporary Parisian prostitutes, who are career whores, permanently “marked” with their venal identity as *filles inscrites* (or, if *insoumises*, persistently threatened by the possibility of being *mise en carte* by the *police des mœurs*).⁷⁴ Barrès’s narrator in *Les Déracinés* finds in this fact a justification of the *brasserie à femmes*:

⁷² Caroline de Mulder, “Virus d’amour d’Adolphe Tabarant (1886): le carabin et la syphilitique,” in *Curieux curiosa: onzième Colloque des Invalides*, 9 novembre 2007 (Tusson: Du Lérot, 2009), 52.

⁷³ Both “utile” and “agréable” are adjectives used by Barrès to describe the brasserie, echoing, of course, the Horatian poetic precept. This interpretation is consistent with Barrès’s more general aestheticization of the brasserie, a distancing gesture that may help us understand Barrès’s position in *Le Quartier latin*. Similarly, he effects a temporal distancing of his narrative self from the *bachelier* experience, writing the monograph “pour mes fils quand ils auront vingt ans” and expressing an affectionate nostalgia for the space; this despite the fact that he is only twenty-six at the time of publication, and the brasseries are still a forceful presence on the Parisian scene.

⁷⁴ While the *filles de brasserie* were never *mises en carte* because of their work in the brasserie, Coffignon notes that there are also some “filles ayant pratiqué la prostitution, mais qui sont lassées des dangers qu’elle leur fait courir; un certain nombre sont même inscrites à la Préfecture de police en qualité de filles soumises.” Coffignon, *Paris vivant: La Corruption à Paris*, 97.

Ces agitées de choix traversent la brasserie, mais n'y demeurent pas. C'est un refuge, c'est une montre où elles rentrent après chaque amant quitté pour vivre en bavardant jusqu'à une nouvelle aventure. Au reste, ces créatures, sacrifiées par la société à la jeunesse mâle, ne font qu'apparaître. Quand elles remplissent avec conscience leur fonction, qui est de mettre de l'entrain à la brasserie, au restaurant, à Bullier et, vers l'aube, aux Halles, en quatre ou six ans elles disparaissent. (180-181)

The unregulated *serveuse* is able to conceive of her time in the brasserie as a rite of passage, one that not only furnishes a decent living wage but also allows her to dissimulate her prostitutional practice behind the bocks she sells and the stories she tells, and thus efface it from her own future narrative once she leaves the brasserie behind.⁷⁵ Though the *bachelier* and the *fille* are both complicit in the brasserie's success, and follow the same general course, they are most often at individual cross-purposes: she has a personal role in her client's projected future (at least according to the traditional moralist paradigm), while his role in her plan is purely that of an exchange value. And yet, while this distinction demarcates a departure from traditional prostitutional forms, the difference is compromised under the leveling weight of the economic transaction, which implies "the mutual reduction of two persons to the status of mere means."⁷⁶

Theirs are not the only competing and complicit plots in *Virus d'amour*, which is constructed palimpsestically upon several layers of narration. As I adduced in the beginning of this chapter, the job of the brasserie girl herself is to embed her clients into a narrative fiction of her desire; while the *fille de brasserie* proffers her time for sale like every other variety of prostitute, her narratological impulses afford her access to some of the temporal tools employed by the novelist. Thus at the innermost layer of the *mise-en-abyme* of narration that constitutes the novel, we encounter Alphonsine practicing a writerly strategy: "the masterful management of suspense and mystery, artfully leading the reader through an elaborate dilatory space that is always full of signs to be read, but always

⁷⁵ Macé tells us that a typical brasserie prostitute earned "un gain moyen de 8fr. par jour," making it more lucrative than other types of prostitution.

⁷⁶ Simmel, "Prostitution," 122.

menaced with misreading until the very end.”⁷⁷ In this schema, Alphonsine’s primary “reader” is her brasserie client, who follows her around chasing what Huysmans’s narrator derisively calls “une chaîne ininterrompue de carottes” (205); of course we, as readers of her text, must also be mindful of the signs she sells.

The only paying “reader” / customer that we meet in Tabarant’s novel is known simply as the *Anglais*, a well-heeled man of thirty-five or forty, “sablé dans un vêtement très à la mode,” who comes to the *Cœur-Chaud* expressly to see Alphonsine. She has already made him wait before his arrival; more precisely, her syphilis has delayed their encounter, as he had come looking for her the previous day when she was home sick with her newly-discovered “maladie” (485). Though his person leaves her cold, his wallet ignites her desire; she is willing to spend “une longue nuit de martyre” with him, since he will pay her two *louis* for the privilege, the equivalent of “huit tarifs ordinaires” from her usual “Pierre et Paul” (489). Immediately, then, Alphonsine sets the brasserie scheme in motion by communicating her fictional desire, receiving him with “mille gentilleses” and telling him “que précisément elle pensait à lui” (485). While the *Anglais* believes she has been thinking of him, the external reader knows that the veritable antecedent for “lui” is the money that he represents.⁷⁸ Alphonsine must initiate him into her plot, ensuring that he is committed to his quest and that the fulfillment of his desires will reciprocally fulfill her own. To that end, she “oublia les autres pour ne s’occuper que de lui,” engaging him in small talk and freely giving him her attention. Though she “se mettait en quatre pour paraître agreeable” – and here, “paraître” is a critical indicator of her representative play – Alphonsine is perturbed to find him cold and aloof (485). As we might expect, given Alphonsine’s own predilections, his disinterest in the meal offered for his consumption (both portions of which, of course, he pays for) is seen as a particular affront.

⁷⁷ Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 168.

⁷⁸ In this reading, money is personified, as the disjunctive pronoun “lui” (as opposed to the adverbial pronoun “y”) refers to people.

“N’ayant pas fait honneur au repas” that Alphonsine has selected, he has metonymically rejected her true desire (487).

And so, she changes strategies and redoubles her efforts. With no desire of her own to speak of, save her *gourmandise*, at work in the brasserie, Alphonsine can satisfy her own appetites for food and drink while profitably whetting her client’s appetite for *her*: “Son plan consistait simplement à se faire payer à diner. Coucher avec lui, cela ne lui souriait guère” (485). To fulfill her dual goal – stimulating his desire for food and drink to maximize the establishment’s profits, as well as stimulating his desire for her to line her own pockets – Alphonsine must show considerable hermeneutic skill in selling her story, manipulating her target and instilling desire by showing disinterest and staging obstacles, such as the presence of a rival, which he must vanquish to win her affection. *Virus d’amour* indicates that these narrative strategies were common practice among the *filles de brasserie*: “Dans le même moment, elles *se montraient* agréables à trois ou quatre clients, courant de l’un à l’autre et distribuant les sourires de telle façon que chacun devait *se croire préféré*” (484; my emphasis). In a tone nearly indiscernable from the novel’s, Virmaître’s treatise corroborates the observation: “Elles devaient se *montrer aimables* aux clients. Si elles semblaient un *peu froides*, la caissière leur criait: — *Vous n’avez pas le sentiment du commerce!*”⁷⁹ Even if, according to the watchful eye of the *caissière* or the *gérant*, they occasionally lack the “sentiment du commerce,” they must continually master what we might term the “commerce du sentiment.”

With a posture evocative of the Girardian concept of mimetic desire, the *fille de brasserie* earns her keep by making her man feel not merely wanted but “*préféré*,” the participial adjective implying that she is actively choosing him over other potential lovers. Instinctively taking commercial advantage of the “vieille fleur bleue,” the “vieil idéal d’une affection rance et vague,” that Huysmans cites as the motor for the brasserie’s success, Alphonsine both enacts and creates the illusion of

⁷⁹ Virmaître, *Trottoirs et lupanars*, 160. Emphasis original.

agency – of a choice that reflects her client’s desirability back to him (204).⁸⁰ By dissembling the economic transaction behind these layers of narrative-producing desire, her prostitutional discourse prolonging the productive *attente* with a series of Barthesian “retards,” she inscribes her client into a narrative of quest and conquest.⁸¹ Here again, des Esseintes shows a critical understanding of the *fille de brasserie*’s literary maneuvers:

Au contraire, la cour faite à une fille de brasserie, ménageait toutes les susceptibilités de l’amour, toutes les délicatesses du sentiment. Celle-là, on se la disputait, et ceux auxquels elle consentait à octroyer, moyennant de copieux salaires, un rendez-vous, s’imaginaient, de bonne foi, l’avoir emporté sur un rival, être l’objet d’une distinction honorifique, d’une faveur rare. (204)

Sketching out this narrative with her words and gestures seems to come perfectly naturally to Alphonsine. As if unaware of the artifice of her actions, and with no apparent goal in view other than assuaging her boredom, Alphonsine turns her attentions to the soon-to-be rival, an overgrown, 30-year-old *bachelier* named Malabert, an habitué of the brasserie known as the “roi du Quartier.” Tired of “la froideur bête de son Anglais,” Alphonsine effects a narrative detour: “[elle] tourna toute sa gentillesse du côté de Malabert, s’extasiant sur sa bonne mine et lui tâtant ses bras potelés, qu’elle trouvait doux comme du coton. Ah! il eût pu se montrer à la foire pour dix centimes, disait-elle” (488).⁸² A bit past his prime, Malabert could nonetheless easily take his place among the *Déracinés*.⁸³ He has come to Paris with his “huit mille balles de rente [...] sous prétexte de travailler son

⁸⁰ The *brasserie à femmes* thus flips the selective hierarchy of – or, we might say, runs *à rebours* to – the tolerated brothel, where the male client selects his preferred *fille* in a *salon de choix*, a room where the various prostitutes are displayed like goods in a shop window. In *Virus d’amour*, Alphonsine selects the customer with whom she will “faire la noce” as she might choose pastries from the *étagères* of a pâtisserie window, or a “bifteck bien tendre” from a boulevard *mastroquet*.

⁸¹ Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1976), 75.

⁸² Alphonsine’s suggestion that Malabert could have been a ten-cent exhibition at the fair recalls the *brasserie à femmes*’s origins at the Exposition Universelle.

⁸³ Perhaps it is because he is older that Malabert (like the *Déracinés*) emerges from the brasserie relatively unscathed. With the critical distance afforded by nostalgia, he recognizes that he is not a character in a brasserie girl’s story; he is a consuming spectator, his Simmelian protective reserve intact.

doctorat,” but after ten years in the capital, schooling is indeed only a pretext for his “vie de diable-à-quatre” (488). Though not exactly the hyperbolic specimen of masculinity that Alphonsine’s fawning implies – her appreciation of his chubby arms suggests that what she most admires are his *gourmand* sensibilities – he has the makings of a potential sentimental rival.

Despite Malabert’s recognition of and complicity in the artifice of Alphonsine’s plot, he is an effective foil for the “Englishman”. All that is required for the narrative scheme that fuels the brasserie’s profits to function is that Alphonsine engender desire by making her client wait, and that he buy (into) the story and fight for her attention and affections; Alphonsine’s plan works like a charm, seducing the *Anglais* into the story she is selling. Heretofore unflappable, he quickly makes his move:

Comme Alphonsine demeurait muette, il prit l’initiative d’une lourde démarche et, se penchant un peu, lui toucha la main. [...] Tout d’un coup, l’Anglais s’émancipa et lui caressa la taille, prenant en quelque sorte possession de ce qu’il venait d’acheter, et jetant maintenant autour de lui des regards de triomphateur.” (489)

His rival sensed, and Alphonsine silent and impassive, the *Anglais* seizes the opportunity to spring into action. Lover and whore in one, the brasserie girl is an identity-affirming other. ‘If I can beat out my rivals and win the leading lady’s affections, triumphing for all to see,’ her client reasons, ‘then I must be someone.’ It is only when he is drawn in *to* and *by* the plot Alphonsine so casually stages that the *Anglais* comes alive, his desire for triumph engendered by the perceived potential for rejection. Though he is proud of his conquest – and indeed, the text’s use of the reflexive verb “s’émanciper” seems a half-hearted gesture towards restoring his agency in his own liberation – there is no doubt that he is also Alphonsine’s willing dupe. His possession of her is qualified by the phrase “en quelque sorte”; he has her in *some* way, but not *every* way.

As even this partial possession is meaningless without a spectator, he immediately casts his “regards de triomphateur” about the room as if to find a reader whose presence will register what

has just happened and cement his leading-man status in this sentimental story of the *Cœur-Chaud*. Here again, the *brasserie à femmes* inverts and undoes the hierarchies that govern traditional prostitution; the client is not the observer, but the observed. That the desire he seeks to savor is not truly mutual does not matter, at least for the moment. While it is clear that, for Alphonsine, her desire lies elsewhere and that the *Anglais* will go only so far as his money can take him – after all, “elle ne voulait pas geler toute une nuit aux côtés d’un pareil glaçon” – it is enough for him that her desire is *vraisemblable*, that it exists on the level of representation (489). His imagination and pride will fill in the blanks with the requisite *romanesque* details. Of course, the “vérité” that lies “au bout du récit,” to employ Barthes’s formulation, is that his passage from passivity to activity is not a transcendent grasping of subjectivity but merely an economic transaction, necessarily ephemeral and devoid of meaning.⁸⁴ “Transactions for money,” Simmel reminds us, “have that character of a purely momentary relationship which leaves no traces, as is the case with prostitution.”⁸⁵ In order to extend the moment of Alphonsine’s identity-affirming “choice” – to render the “fugitif” encounter “éternel,” following the Baudelairean ideal – her client must seek to record it for posterity in the time of narrative. In the end, his goal is neither visual nor sexual; it is a literary drive to extend the “espace dilatoire” of his heroic moment and thus postpone the collapse of his meaningful (fictional) “self”.

And yet, the novel persistently undoes the narratological tendencies that it potentiates in the space of the *brasserie* through a general practice of designification. From the novel’s title to its final page, signs have lost their ability to signify; words and images circulate, disengaged from their meaning, like bocks and coins in the *brasserie*. In Tabarant’s novel, the concept of love has lost its transcendent implications and degenerated into an equivocal sign whose sentimental referent is only

⁸⁴ Barthes, *S/Z*, 75.

⁸⁵ Simmel, “Prostitution,” 121.

a simulacrum. Here, *amour* is a diseased signifier and descriptor of disease (“virus d’amour”); *Amours* is the name of the first brasserie that employs Alphonsine. In both cases, “amour” is love in name only, its presence in the novel’s title and the brasserie’s name suggestive of its shattered status. Like Alphonsine’s desire, brasserie “love” is confined to the level of representation: a textual erotics staged in the service of commercial success, as the generically sentimental names of the novel’s brasseries (*Amours*, *Cœur-Chaud*) imply. This dissociative propensity is pervasive throughout the novel. The *Anglais*, in fact, is not actually English; he derives his name only from his “touche d’Anglais,” an affected exoticism that inverts the paradigm of costumed brasserie prostitution. The Balzacian-style narrative of conquest can only be rented, for the price of a few drinks and a *jambon-choucroute*. The brasserie is a disorderly house of fiction, one whose principal commerce is in selling vacant signs. The incessant circulation of money, the actual motor of the brasserie’s stories, “hollows out the core of things, their peculiarities, their specific values and their uniqueness and incomparability in a way which is beyond repair.”⁸⁶

That the clients depicted in *Virus d’amour* do not conform to the stereotypical brasserie model only serves to undermine further the potentially disruptive signifying ability of the whore’s sentimental story. Unlike the *déracinés*, the *Cœur-Chaud*’s clients do not fit the mold of young men ripe for an initiatory romance. Malabert and his friends are thirty years old, well past their *bachelier* prime. The *Anglais*, who remains otherwise generic except for his monetary means, is “frisant la quarantaine.” These overgrown boys may be sad and jaded, but they are not fundamentally defenseless against Alphonsine’s grander narrative *tours* and *détours*. Though he will later take Alphonsine in when he finds her living in the streets, and suffer by watching her slowly die, Malabert is only a friend; his trajectory is not affected by hers. He congenially continues his debaucherous outings during and despite Alphonsine’s demise. Similarly, the *Anglais* escapes unscathed, his ego

⁸⁶ Simmel, “Metropolis,” 330.

satisfied by Alphonsine's "affections" but not implicated beyond the night they spend together. These are not the susceptible young men of the alarmist treatises whose futures are tragically denied on a *fille de brasserie*'s whim, nor even Barrèsian *bacheliers* whose formation is at stake in the liminal space of the brasserie. Many times removed from the idealistic *arrivistes* of story, their presence crosses into the realm of the parodic. By staging atypical, less vulnerable clients in the *Cœur-Chaud*, the novel wipes out Alphonsine's threat to textual mastery before her narrative practices can foment the type of disorder that befalls Macé's *Le Sieur A*.

Textually Transmitted Disease: The Virus des *Amours*

Indeed, Alphonsine's projected path, her theoretical "way out" of and future beyond the brasserie and prostitution, is compromised before the reader ever encounters her through a progressive confinement of her space and time. Despite the series of perceptible and disorderly transgressions housed in the *brasserie à femmes* Tabarant's novel (and here, following Bakhtin, we might remember its carnivalesque Exposition roots as a predictor of these inversions), the novel consistently manifests a compulsion to hem them in and reorder them in the space of the medically-inflected metanarrative.⁸⁷ This aggressive gesture is, of course, typical of naturalist narratives, whose authority rests on the generative force of determinism and the univocal signification of an especially observant narrator. Recalling de Mulder's assertion that *Virus* lengthens and develops the last few pages of *Nana*, in which Zola's protagonist is decomposing and dying of smallpox, we may intuit that Alphonsine's story is to be a prostitudinal life foreshortened. She is marked for extinction, so to speak, before her plot begins, in an authorial circumscription that delimits the temporal boundaries of Alphonsine's potential narrative mobility. That Tabarant changed the title of his work

⁸⁷ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984). See also Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986).

before its publication, from *Syphilitique* to *Virus d'amour*, further suggests a preventative, paranoid wresting of plot control from his protagonist.⁸⁸ Unlike Zola's *Nana*, Huysmans's *Marthe*, Edmond de Goncourt's *La Fille Élisa*, and lesser known prostitutional heroines such as Adolphe Belot's *Alphonsine*, Alphonsine's name is here estranged and dissociated from the text that tells her story, which carries instead the title of the disease that afflicts her: the "virus of love," syphilis.

The death sentence of Tabarant's title changes our readerly expectations by altering traditional narrative dynamics: namely, we know the ending from the beginning. Though the narrator, recounting Alphonsine's inner thoughts as she lies in bed while home sick from work in the brasserie, claims on her behalf that "elle s'amendait [...] Elle ne s'enivrait plus, changeait sa ligne de conduite, [...] serva[it] des bocks avec une bégueulerie de fille bien élevée," the "petite tache rose" that has appeared on her body empties the promised changes of meaning and reorients Alphonsine's narrative in the direction promised by the title (476). As a bodily transcription of the verbal "virus d'amour," the syphilitic stain doubly determines her fate: it is the mark of an authorially-imposed narrative structure that will keep her in [the plot]line and lead to her demise, and also an intertextual echo of *Nana*'s contaminatory *signe*, a corporeal sign of the prostitute's destructive force.⁸⁹ Though "amour" has been voided of signification, the "virus" has not; in *Virus d'amour*, the only signs that signify reliably originate from Alphonsine's body. Semantically reminiscent of the hybrid offspring of a romance novel and a medical treatise (and in fact, the novel

⁸⁸ Colette Baudet, *Grandeur et misères d'un éditeur belge: Henry Kistemaekers (1851-1934)* (Brussels: Éditions Labor, 1986), 235.

⁸⁹ *Nana*'s beauty mark, of course, is uncannily similar to the Comtesse Sabine's. Here, the transposition of this mark as a syphilitic chancre marks a displacement from *Nana*: the hereditary, innate "signe" has become the contagious, contingent *tache*.

itself often comes off as such), *Virus d'amour* promises – and delivers – Alphonsine's diseased body as text.⁹⁰ As she goes, so goes the narrative.

Both the diegetic and extradiegetic treatment of Alphonsine's disease, initially believed to be curable, are contingent on strategies of time management. After all, "pour se soigner, il fallait disposer de son temps, ce qui ne lui était pas possible" (483). Beyond the base interpretation of Alphonsine's proclamation – that she does not "disposer de son temps," because for a prostitute time is money and she has no money – lies a shadowy truth: it is the novel that "dispose de son temps." Indeed, the novel insistently divests Alphonsine of her time by divesting her of her space; her plot is a recurrent staging of time run out, as made manifest by her constant exclusion from spaces of familiarity. In her first *hôtel* in the square Monge, she initially avoids the *patron* Boulard (to whom she owes 120 francs) on December 30, knowing that "l'échéance tombait donc aujourd'hui même" (492). Though she is able to defer "l'échéance" to January 8, and even then "elle s'attarda, remit la chose," she must eventually "déménager à la cloche de bois" through subterfuge and evasion. This will be the only occasion in the novel in which Alphonsine is able to defer her displacement before acquiescing; the rhythm of her homelessness accelerates, and along with it, the narrative. Her departure from her first apartment, at the end of Chapter III, is followed by a temporal lacuna of six months, after which we find her "déplorablement changé[e]" and living in an apartment on the rue Clignancourt (513). In the interval, we find out, her syphilis has significantly worsened, and she has been forced to leave yet another house on the rue d'Amsterdam. She will soon be evicted from the Clignancourt apartment, as well; it is the last home of her own she will have. For all her expertise in strategies of ruse and deferral in the brasserie, those strategies fall flat when she attempts to deploy them to delay her own economic transactions.

⁹⁰ It also denotes an additional Zolian displacement, this time with reference to the novel that lies on the threshold between Nana's adolescence (*L'Assommoir*) and adulthood (*Nana*). *Une page d'amour* has devolved into *Virus d'amour*; the material page is replaced by Alphonsine's disease.

The stories Alphonsine tells and sells to her clients in the brasserie, it seems, are easily circumscribable – the watchful eyes of the *gérant* and the narrator keeping her in line – and thus safe for readerly consumption. As the narrative develops, however, Alphonsine loses not only her homes (site of her sexual practice), but also her home away from home, the brasserie (site of her textual practice). Whereas Alphonsine changes spaces incessantly because her little money will not buy her more time – stereotypically, her appetites for food and fashion are too voracious for her to remain solvent – her friend Malabert moves only to stir things up because he is bored, as “un prétexte à chahut, une cause de boucan bien naturelle” (488). And yet, with its temporal precision, the novel leaves no doubt as to the stakes of Malabert’s relocation: “On planterait la crémaillère le surlendemain, 1^{er} janvier” (ibid.). On the threshold of a new home and a new year, the stage is set for crisis; the catch is that the crisis is to be not Malabert’s, but rather Alphonsine’s. At the party, where Alphonsine, Malabert, and several other *bacheliers* and *filles de brasserie* gather to celebrate all the newness and drink to excess, Alphonsine becomes taken with the idea of going to Bullier to dance. At the *bal*, a medical student and habitué of the *Cœur-Chaud* named Lucien takes the noisy, raucous Alphonsine aside and changes everything: “Dis-donc, souffla-t-il, il paraît que tu as la vérole?” (500). With his words, which textualize (the expression “il paraît que” indicative of its representative nature) and realize her disease, Alphonsine’s exclusion from her own narrative goals beyond the plot of her syphilis begins in earnest. Her actions for the rest of the evening will lead to her permanent dismissal from the brasserie, and thus to her precipitated descent into street prostitution and homelessness. We will return to this final brasserie scene momentarily. For now I wish to emphasize that Malabert becomes complicit in Alphonsine’s homelessness, his stability a catalyst for her *chute*, and thus is the novel’s partner in asserting the limits of her agency.

Virus d’amour’s chronological paranoia, which in its efforts to control Alphonsine’s narrative production excludes her from its source in the brasserie, echoes the myriad critics who cite the

brasserie prostitute as an instigator of irregularity (to name only one, *Le Sieur A*, the young brasserie victim whom we met earlier, was an orderly engineer, “d’une conduite fort régulière,” before falling for his *fille*). The notion of regularity so characteristic of this critical discourse mimics and redeploys a much more familiar trope. “Father’s time, mother’s species,” Julia Kristeva remarks after James Joyce, “et c’est en effet à l’espace générant et formant notre espèce humaine que l’on pense en évoquant le nom et le destin des femmes, davantage qu’au *temps*, au devenir ou à l’histoire.”⁹¹ Grounded in space, Kristeva continues, women traditionally only have access to time as “la *répétition* et *l’éternité* [...] cycles, gestation, éternel retour d’un rythme biologique qui s’accorde à celui de la nature.”⁹² Women’s “time,” intimately linked to maternity and reproduction, is pervaded by a discourse of regularity; a woman who breaks the rules (in French, *rompt les règles*, with *règles* meaning both rules and the menstrual period) is both biologically and behaviorally *irrégulière*. Though work in the brasserie is cyclical and repetitive, characterized by Tabarant’s narrator as “la banalité de l’habitude” and mocked by Huysmans, who paints them as “des automates remontés à la fois par la même clef, lanç[ant] du même ton les mêmes invites, débit[ant] avec le même sourire les mêmes propos biscornus, les mêmes réflexions baroques,” the fact that they can posit a future beyond the brasserie troubles the narrative stasis. “Any effort to envisage a goal,” Yi-Fu Tuan states, “generates a spatio-temporal structure. Habit, by dulling the sense of purpose and of anxious striving, weakens it.”⁹³ When Alphonsine becomes too *irrégulière* – that is, when she enters the linear time of narrative and history by plotting her own course – she poses a threat that the novel seeks to efface by bringing her back in “line,” by confining her to the space and time of the master narrative. In this sense, the

⁹¹ Julia Kristeva, “Le Temps des femmes,” 34/44: *Cahiers de recherche de S.T.D. (Sciences des textes et documents) Paris VII* no. 5 (Winter 1979): 6. For a recent discussion of the stakes of Kristeva’s thoughts on time, see Emily Apter, “‘Women’s Time’ in Theory,” *Differences* 21, no. 1 (January 1, 2010): 1–18.

⁹² Kristeva, “Le Temps des femmes,” 6.

⁹³ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, ed. Karen E. Till and Steven Hoelscher (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2001), 128.

disquietude generated by the brasserie whore echoes the fears surrounding hysterics, whose unsettling mobility, as Janet Beizer has skillfully shown, threatens a social structure predicated upon woman staying in her place.⁹⁴

Writing Back

Up to this point I have shown that Tabarant's novel reacts to Alphonsine's authorial power in the brasserie by repeatedly asserting its narrative control over her unruly body and mouth, divesting her of her own narrative and confining her to its clearly delimited plot. What I would like to suggest now is that Alphonsine continuously resists and subverts this circumscription by "writing" in other ways: with the movement of her body, her body itself, and finally, her voice. The text fights back; I do not in any way mean to imply that *Virus d'amour* is a protofeminist statement on prostitutional subjectivity. Rather, I want to propose that both the success of and fear provoked by the *brasserie à femmes* are indicative of a more generalized aesthetic and observational shift occasioned by the conditions of Parisian modernity, and that we can trace this nascent sense of narrative trouble in Tabarant's novel.

Let us now return to the scene that occasions Alphonsine's exit from the brasserie, which occurs after less than one quarter of the novel has elapsed. Showing up drunk ("ivre morte") to the brasserie after her confrontation with Lucien at Bullier to confront her "friend" Adrienne – who had "diagnosed" Alphonsine's syphilis at the beginning of the novel and was the only one in the know – Alphonsine finds that words are no longer sufficient for her self-expression.⁹⁵ Quite literally "expressing" and externalizing the vast quantities of alcohol, food and clumsy seduction she has

⁹⁴ Janet Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies: Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 48.

⁹⁵ That Adrienne diagnoses Alphonsine's syphilis upon visual examination of her body ("Oh! Mais c'est la maladie, ma chère!") aligns her with the *carabins* whose penetrating observation Alphonsine fears, as well as with the medical gaze of the novel itself.

consumed up to that point, she begins to spew liquids on her way to the brasserie.⁹⁶ She urinates on the boulevard Saint-Michel (alongside her dog) in front of a crowd of mocking young boys; she leans against a public urinal and spits “des glaires verdâtres” that splatter onto her blouse; her mouth begins to dribble as she talks to a group of young men who recognize her from her brasserie glory (501). Once she is in the *Cœur-Chaud*, Alphonsine’s uncontrolled, nonsensical emissions morph into a flurry of bodily invective as she slaps and kicks Adrienne, setting off a series of gestures and behaviors that suggest that what is inside Alphonsine is not containable and must be expressed by any means possible. When the *gérant* tries to break up the fight between the two *filles*, asking repeatedly “Qu’est-ce que ça signifie?,” Alphonsine’s answer is oral but non-verbal: she vomits (“dégobill[e] sa vidange”) on a table occupied by two of Adrienne’s clients, and then attempts to spit on Adrienne (“crach[e] dans la direction d’Adrienne”); the “mollard” sticks to Alphonsine instead, “s’étala[n]t comme une huître sur sa devanture” (502). Her final act before being thrown out the door is to emit a “souffle empesté,” which compounds the “puanteur qui montait” (ibid.). Adrienne reciprocates Alphonsine’s gestures, with the text metonymically attributing and continuing Alphonsine’s spillage to Adrienne’s mouth: the latter “s’écriait, continuant à transvaser sa bile” (503). Though the scene manifests an abject fear of disease transmission and contamination (syphilis was thought to be especially prevalent among brasserie prostitutes), as well as what Janet Beizer has shown to be an age-old paranoia about women’s excessive secretions, it also witnesses an explosion of corporeal rhetoric that cannot be contained by the disciplinary eye of the *gérant*.⁹⁷ Rather than

⁹⁶ As we have seen, Alphonsine was indeed a voracious consumer, not only of food, drink and fashion, but of novels: specifically, *romans-feuilletons*. When she takes to street prostitution after being kicked out of the brasserie, she cites the novels as her inspiration: “Elle voulait inaugurer d’ici là son premier tour de boulevard et se faisait des illusions de fillette, alimentées par une douzaine de romans bêtes, des montépinades que lui laissait dévorer Garnot, son premier amant” (508). “Montépinades” refers to Xavier de Montepin (1823-1902), a popular *feuilletoniste* whose *La Porteuse de pain* (1884-1889) was one of the century’s bestsellers.

⁹⁷ As Beizer says, “...typical is the presentation of the hysterical voice as an unrestrained interiorized force that must be stopped. Unable to hold her tongue, helpless to contain the flood of fictions, words, yaps, and cries endlessly welling up within her and spilling out, the nineteenth-century hysteric presents an extreme version of the image of ‘leaking vessel’

respond to her manager's question of *what* her outburst means, then, Alphonsine calls into question "*comment ça signifie*." It "means" nothing, except that the possibility of a complete, digestible reading or "meaning" has itself broken down (been "denature[é] par l'alambic de l'estomac") and been spit out. The insistence on the "infection de matières où nageaient des brouyures du repas" that Alphonsine regurgitates, as well as her excessive drunkenness (utterly common in *filles de brasserie*, according to the treatises), indicate that if she is indeed a "leaking vessel," she only excretes what she has consumed.⁹⁸ Here we might remember one of the most common epithets used to refer to the brasserie whore: "verseuse," or pourer. That she did not typically pour the actual bocks she served to her clients – she was the intermediary between client and pourer – only reinforces the sense that she herself was the source of an alternative flow, that of story. And indeed *verseuse* is not only sonically evocative of but etymologically tied to *vers*, the poetic verse, both words stemming from the Latin verb *vertere*, to turn. The *verseuse*, then, is not only a woman who pours bocks, but a woman who writes with the turns of her body (the Certalian "courbes en pleins et déliés" of the urban walker) and diverts narrative.⁹⁹ The very materiality of her brasserie "emissions" – so far removed from the fawning fictions of Alphonsine's interaction with the *Anglais* and, more generally, of the *fille de brasserie*'s communication with the *bachelier* – makes manifest the irreality of the formational fictions she sells to clients who wish to leave their mark, and the erosion of the masculine realist paradigm that spawned them.

traditionally associated with the verbally and sexually excessive woman." A comparison with the complaints about brasserie prostitution shows significant overlap between this conception of the "leaky" hysteric and fears surrounding the spatially and verbally mobile prostitute. Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies*, 47.

⁹⁸ What I am calling Alphonsine's alternative "writing" in the brasserie evokes Barbey d'Aureville's invective against women writers, "Les Bas-Bleus," in which he declares that "impunies, elles ont débordé." Though he speaks of the sheer number of women writers, the use of the verb "déborder," to overflow, appropriates the medical discourse that attributed to women an excess of secretions. Jules Barbey d'Aureville, "Les Bas-Bleus," in *XIXe Siècle: Les Œuvres et Les Hommes*, 5. (Paris: Société générale de librairie catholique, 1878), 343.

⁹⁹ Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien*, 147.

The metaphors used in the critical literature to refer to brasserie prostitution betray an apprehension about the *verseuse*'s creative force. Among many other colorful names, Alfred Carel calls the Third Republic *verseuses* "les horribles 'pieuvres' que nous a léguées l'Empire."¹⁰⁰ The octopus deploys secretions that threaten those who would approach it; that the octopus extrudes ink only serves to strengthen the suspicion that the mistrust of the brasserie whore betrays a latent fear that she is a site of a perilous textual production that erodes the masculine subject it inscribes. In his 1885 monograph on clandestine prostitution in fin-de-siècle France, Louis Martineau uses another eight-membered animal as a metaphor for the *serveuse*, envisioning the *brasserie à femmes* as "le centre d'une toile d'araignée où viennent se prendre les consommateurs."¹⁰¹ Like the octopus, the spider secretes a productive substance; additionally, the spider's secretion is proactive and aggressive, actively entrapping its prey rather than defending against it. Remembering with Roland Barthes that "*Texte* veut dire *Tissu*," we might argue that the spider web that ensnares the *brasserie à femmes*'s "consommateurs" – and, by extension, threatens to enmesh the author who observes her – is a fabric woven from the *fils* of the *fille de brasserie*'s text.¹⁰² Barthes, in fact, employs the spider's web as his archetypal image for the metaphor of textual generation:

Alors que jusqu'ici on a toujours pris ce tissu pour un produit, un voile tout fait, derrière lequel se tient, plus ou moins caché, le sens (la vérité), nous accentuons maintenant, dans le tissu, l'idée générative que le texte se fait, se travaille à travers un entrelacs perpétuel; perdu dans ce tissu – cette texture – le sujet s'y défait, telle une araignée qui se dissoudrait elle-même dans les sécrétions constructives de sa toile.¹⁰³

Textual secretions, Barthes tells us, are a constructive force of destruction; in creating text, they dissolve the subject, unweaving its constitutive fibers. Barthes's formulation provides a model for

¹⁰⁰ Carel, *Les brasseries à femmes de Paris*, 3. Carel, *Les Brasseries*, 3.

¹⁰¹ Louis Martineau, *La prostitution clandestine* (Paris: Bataille, 1885), 75.

¹⁰² Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du texte* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), 85.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

Alphonsine's alternative textual production in the *brasserie*, which takes the form not only of the blatantly artificial stories she tells to her clients, but of the waste products she produces. She resists being fashioned into a ready-made, masterable textual "produit." Symptomatic of a pervasive sense that "in this debauched climate, men were softened rather than formed," to cite Judith Surkis's formulation, the *serveuse* poses a threat with her secretions that both entrap and dissolve their prey – a menace here made visible in the form of syphilis.¹⁰⁴ She wordlessly fights back against her textual exile by "writing" back, by vomiting up what she has consumed and eroding the limits of representational confinement.

Upon her ejection from the *brasserie*, Alphonsine's resistance to her fate is reproduced thematically on several levels, each reciprocated by some form of textual rejection of her efforts. Hungover the next morning (which begins the novel's next chapter), she starts to wander through the streets of the Latin Quarter, "presque heureuse de se trouver libre" (503). The narrative follows Alphonsine's decaying frame obsessively and complicitly as she wanders through Paris in fits and starts, changing houses, prostituting herself on the street, and gradually displaying the ravaging toll of syphilis from head to toe. When she attempts to "reprendre le tablier de brasserie" – even deciding to "essayer de l'autre rive," where contaminating word of her disease will not have traveled, to find a fresh start – her friend Nanine tells her the *Tir-Cujas* is full (504). Near the end of her time in Paris, the novel directs Alphonsine to a new establishment on the rue Turbigo, the *Brasserie des Hirondelles*, that is to open a few weeks later; though they take her on as a *serveuse*, she will be hospitalized in the *Lourcine* before it opens. Alphonsine, like the reader, continually wonders if she will make it back to the *brasserie* ("La vie de brasserie, est-ce qu'elle était capable d'en tâter de nouveau? Non, ça lui semblait certain, elle n'avait plus assez de chic pour trôner entre les tables") – or if she even wants to ("Oh! elle en avait assez de ces sales boîtes. Jamais plus elle n'y mettrait les

¹⁰⁴ Surkis, *Sexing the Citizen*, 97.

pattes”) (539, 507). The question is moot; the novel accords her an illusion of choice and spatial mobility only long enough to drive the plot, and then wrests it away. Similarly, when she resorts to street prostitution, it becomes clear that she is playing a role in a plot that is not her own. Like the *bacheliers* that patronize the *Cœur-Chaud*, she bases her behavior on a literary illusion, reduced to imitating from memory the “ritournelles communes à toutes les filles travaillant ainsi” that she has learned from her *romans-feuilletons* (521). The “ainsi” clearly demarcates *Virus d’amour*’s brasserie plot from a novel of street prostitution, such as Huysmans’s *Marthe* (indeed Léo refers to Marthe’s “infâmes ritournelles” in Huysmans’s novel), and adumbrates the insuperable gap between Alphonsine’s narrative past and present. As if paranoid that the protagonist’s brasserie work is potentially transgressive, the novel divests her of her own stories and inserts her into another naturalist plot.

Alphonsine’s freedom of movement is thus repeatedly blocked by an aggressive authorial presence. In its attempt to cure the protagonist of her disruptive irregularity, the novel stages a series of authoritarian and often medical gazes, actual and imagined, whose probing mastery Alphonsine finds threatening. The morning after the brasserie scene – significantly, New Year’s Day – Alphonsine goes to a public toilet in the Tour-Saint-Jacques and begins to read. She is not now flipping through another *montépinade*, however, but rather a predictive text of her dire future. In a metonymic slippage from body to book, Alphonsine is compelled to turn to the medical tomes of the syphilograph docteur [Philippe] Ricord upon “reading” the signs that mark her skin: “Elle aborda les water-closets. [...] Elle regarda sa chair où ça et là se dessinaient les arabesques des plaques jaunâtres, et une pensée l’assombrit. Elle se rappelait avoir vu, chez son premier amant, des livres de médecine traitant des maladies vénériennes” (503).¹⁰⁵ As images of tumors and chancres

¹⁰⁵ Here we might recall Peter Brooks’s celebrated discussion in *Reading for the Plot* of plot in Balzac: “Deviance, detour, an intention that is irritation: these are characteristics of the narratable, of ‘life’ as it is the material of narrative, of *fabula* become *sjuzet*. Plot is a kind of arabesque or squiggle toward the end. It is like that arabesque from *Tristram Shandy*,

begin to dance in her mind's eye, she inscribes herself into the medical narrative of the books, which strikes her with its “gravures artistement coloriées, offrant les détails les plus minutieux du corps humain, permettant d'étudier les aspects du mal sans le secours d'aucun texte” (504). That she notes the lack of textual support is itself notable, as her projection of her own medical future is similarly incomplete:

Alphonsine se figurait anxieusement [...] n'étant bientôt plus qu'une vaste plaie suppurante, d'une désagrégeante putridité. Alors, sa destinée serait nette. Elle croupirait indéfiniment dans un hôpital, servirait de *prétexte* à l'essai des remèdes contradictoires, et, plus tard, après l'*épilogue* de l'agonie, on la flanquerait sur une table d'amphithéâtre avec l'indifférence d'un boucher déchargeant un quartier de vache sur un étal [...]. (504; emphasis mine)

In her paranoid projection of her own body as medical spectacle, Alphonsine slides from pretext to epilogue; much like Ricord's illustrated tome, her narrative is missing its text. What she elides is the body of the text – that is, the text written by her body: *Virus d'amour*. The narrative future

Alphonsine imagines for herself is an overdetermined microcosm of the novel's plot that suggests an anxious redoubling of the novel's affirmation of textual control.

The novel's insistent deployment of various *carabins* who cross Alphonsine's path mirrors the role of the *police des mœurs* in regulated prostitution; set loose from governmental regulation, Alphonsine is authorially subjected to medical law.¹⁰⁶ Though the *carabins* of the Lourcine are among her brasserie's most faithful clients, and her body has long been regularly “exposed” to their attention, Alphonsine is haunted by the specter of their presence once she is removed from the *Cœur-Chaud*: “L'affront des visites publiques lui paraissait insupportable. S'exhiber devant une

retraced by Balzac, that suggests the arbitrary, transgressive, gratuitous line of narrative, its deviance from the straight line, the shortest distance between beginning and end – which would be the collapse of one into the other, of life into immediate death.” Brooks, *Reading for the Plot*, 104. Garnot, who also allowed Alphonsine to “devour” the *romans-feuilletons*, was himself a *carabin*.

¹⁰⁶ When Alphonsine meets Émile Moreau, a friend of Malabert's, at his housewarming party, she betrays a hybrid fear of authority stemming from her syphilis. If Émile were to find out, she reasons, she will be susceptible to the same discipline as a common street whore: the *mise en carte*. “Mais au bout de vingt-quatre heures il saurait tout et la ferait mettre en carte! On la cloîtrerait dans un hôpital et bonsoir la liberté! Donc, la nécessité d'un traitement s'imposait. Elle se soignerait, certainement, elle se soignerait. Après tout, les médecins ne vous mangeaient pas” (498).

douzaine de jeunes hommes, leur laisser patiner sa chair, être l'objet d'une attention particulière, telles étaient les conditions de cet hôpital, et ce cynisme obligé l'écœurant" (511). She resists treatment of her glaringly serious syphilis, despite Malabert's protestations, because she does not want to submit to the medical gaze of the *carabins*. This apprehension is complicit with a textual architecture invested in Alphonsine's narrative progression toward her disciplinary death. Afraid of the *carabins*, and thus reluctant to seek treatment, Alphonsine accelerates her demise and assures her communion with her Ricordian phantasm.

Alphonsine's paranoia that the *carabins* will dissect her brutally and expose her innards to public observation ("on lui ferait une trouée dans la poitrine à l'aide d'un outil bien affilé, on l'ouvrirait de bas en haut comme une poupée de cire") is metonymically realized by the novel on her living body as her health deteriorates (504).¹⁰⁷ Lacerations and scabbed sores mark her body and take her beauty; a narrative accelerating toward her death its "outil bien affilé," the novel opens her up, her insides spilling out as she contaminates the streets. Ironically, Tabarant includes as a preface to his novel a letter to his editor, the Belgian Henry Kistemaeckers, which reveals an anxiety about his novel suffering the same fate as his protagonist:

La gosse avait, paraît-il, une chair trop nue, une allure trop gaillarde, soufflait trop franchement la vérité de son procès-verbal d'un coin de la vie à la face des bégueuleries épicières, et vous avez dû la discipliner, lui rogner en maint endroit le bout de chemise entrevu par-delà ses jupes, et lui rappeler qu'en ce siècle où domine la stupidité, l'art lui-même est assujéti à des lois spéciales et rigoureuses, comme le lait qu'on baptise ou le beurre frelaté. (473)

Though it may seem that "la gosse" refers to Tabarant's protagonist, who is only twenty when she dies at the end of the novel, the body with the "chair trop nue" is in fact the novel itself. In the

¹⁰⁷ The image of Alphonsine as a wax doll is suggestive, for in Malabert's apartment, we see another wax doll that could be Alphonsine: "une statuette Grévin, représentant une Parisienne frileusement encapuchonnée" (494). That people from her hometown of Saint-Léger calls her "La Parisienne" strengthens the association; the idea of Alphonsine as a mutilated wax doll is reminiscent of Raoule's treatment of Jacques at the end of Rachilde's *Monsieur Vénus* (1884).

author's view, censorship has done physical harm to his textual corpus; those who would excise sections of *Virus* seek to impose physical discipline, “*lacérer des pages, décapiter des phrases*” (473; my emphasis). Compellingly, the two drastic “lacérations” editorially imposed on the novel (much to Tabarant’s chagrin) leave a series of “pointillés” where there would have been scenes of authorial violation – by force or by gaze – of her sex: Alphonsine’s rape by two “gardiens de la paix,” and her gynecological exam at the Lourcine, performed before the probing eyes of a line of medical students. The censorship is thus the only barrier between Alphonsine and her projected vision of her body as a “vaste plaie suppurante,” probed and violated by medical and authorial authority.

Despite the various fluids that will continue to ooze persistently from Alphonsine’s body throughout the novel, blood does not appear until the last pages of *Virus d’amour*. Significantly absent are the fluid traces of Alphonsine’s womanhood; there is no mention of reproduction, no marker of potential maternity other than her caring for her “amant de cœur,” her dog Toto, whom she will sell when true desperation sets in (once again, reducing “love” to the entropic impermanence of money). It is only as Alphonsine’s body decomposes, her innards laid bare as her skin wastes away, that her blood makes a distinctive appearance as “un sang noir coulant de ses plaies béantes” (585). The only blood that flows from Alphonsine is notably black, the color of death and the color of ink. The process of her dying is a process of writing the very novel we are reading, whose lines are traced out in the black ink of her disease. Unlike Emma Bovary, Alphonsine’s ink-blood does not emerge from her mouth; it does not invert the gendered paradigm by giving her a voice, but rather multiplies it and disperses it into manifold sites of bodily signification.¹⁰⁸ As her body vanishes, expressing its corporeal rhetoric through her inky blood, her

¹⁰⁸ For two excellent analyses of this scene from Flaubert’s novel, see the chapter “Restricted Thematics: Madame Bovary” in Naomi Schor, *Breaking the Chain: Woman, Theory and French Realist Fiction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 3–28 and Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies*, 84.

body and her text complete the process of consubstantiation; the fusion announced in her reading of Ricord's medical images is achieved.

À Moi, Maintenant

By way of conclusion, let us return to the end of Alphonsine's life and to the beginning of the chapter, where I posited the Rastignac paradigm as a model for the success of the *brasserie à femmes*. Lying in her childhood bed in her parents' provincial home, Alphonsine is dying the novel's long-promised death of syphilis. Though she thinks for a time that she is cured – a narrative *détour* that leads the reader to question the overdetermined ending – the syphilis soon reappears all the more virulently for having spent “une période de sécurité trompeuse” (581). As readers, we identify finally with Alphonsine (after long finding ourselves in the role of her clients) as she chides herself for believing the disease's narrative trick: “Oh! l'évidence était flagrante. [...] Son aveuglement était d'autant plus impardonnable [qu'elle] savait qu'il fallait se méfier des simulacres de guérison” (581-582). Alphonsine knows all too well these syphilitic strategies of deferral and play, for they are the same tricks that fueled her trade in the brasserie. She has been doubly duped, by her disease and by her narrative, into believing she has a future.

And yet, Alphonsine resists authorial mastery of her body's fate even – and especially – in her final breaths, as she reasserts herself into the narrative. As she endures the agonizing pain of the late stages of syphilis (and the reader endures a series of gruesome descriptions of her body that even her family finds “insupportable[s]”), she decides to take her own life with a vial of atropine rather than continue to suffer. She begins to convulse, falling to the ground; she is alone as her parents and sisters, angry at her debauchery and deceit, celebrate the eldest sister's wedding downstairs. As the poison ravages her body, Alphonsine stages her last act. In a clear intertextual reference to Rastignac's defiant “À nous deux maintenant!” at the end of *Le Père Goriot*, or the street

cries of “À Berlin! à Berlin! à Berlin!” that close *Nana*, Tabarant’s novel ends with Alphonsine’s pained and diegetically unheard deathbed cry: “À moi! à moi! à moi!” As she calls for help in this “poignante articulation [...] de sa gorge presque aphone,” she also reappropriates the narrative; the dual meaning of “à moi” (which is both a cry for help and a taking possession, “mine”) interpellates the reader and stakes Alphonsine’s claim to the text (594). The erstwhile *verseuse* refuses to let the narrative close the book on her, so to speak; the words she emits carry on where her body cannot. In her last narrative *détour*, Alphonsine doubly refuses the novel’s completion. She is not actually dead when the novel ends (“elle se mourait” indicating an ongoing process); she also calls the novel’s narrative integrity into question by implicating the reader in an indirect apostrophe, which “resists narrative,” as Jonathan Culler tells us, “because its *now* is not a moment in a temporal sequence but a *now* of discourse, of writing.”¹⁰⁹

Taking the place of Paris in the *défi* of the original Rastignac, and confronting the *déracinés*, “les jeunes gens de brasserie et autres Rastignacs” who are his failed imitators, Alphonsine’s diseased, dying body turns the tables on the Balzacian arriviste and his breed of city mastery by proving unmasterable itself.¹¹⁰ And still, Paris looms large. Metonymically, by displacement from Balzac’s formulation, she *is* Paris – simply not the literarily constructed Paris that is only conquerable by a fictional hero. Like the city that she writes as she walks, the city whose Balzacian story she sells in the brasserie, she is not tamable by text, not confinable to narrative. Despite its naturalist tendencies and tropes, *Virus d’amour* calls into question the observational and epistemological force of the very medical gaze it deploys from its opening pages by choosing a *fille de brasserie* as its subject. With her “antiphysical,” “unnatural” breed of writerly prostitution, the *verseuse* – that

¹⁰⁹ Jonathan D. Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002), 152.

¹¹⁰ Maurice Barrès, *Sous l’œil des barbares* (Paris: Plon, 1929), 207, <http://artflx.uchicago.edu.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/navigate.pl?frantext0509.1956>.

transubstantiating “Circé de la limonade” – turns the lived novel of formation that her clients (and author, for *Virus* was Tabarant’s first novel) stake on her body into a novel of deformation, by exposing his story as the outmoded mastery paradigm it represents.¹¹¹ Under the weight of the naturalist author’s penetrating stare, the materiality of the body disintegrates, shattering into fragments of fluid and skin that “talk” like the Benjaminian storyteller whose “traces [...] cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel” and erode narrative mastery from within.¹¹²

¹¹¹ As we will see in Chapter Four, the clandestine prostitute’s tactical practice – operating “à partir des seuils où cesse la visibilité,” to use Michel de Certeau’s expression – persistently disrupts the mastery paradigm that drives mimetic fiction throughout the century, crafting a dissensual literary topography. Certeau, *L’invention du quotidien*, 141. The notion of *dissensus*, which I explore in some detail in Chapter Four, is Jacques Rancière’s.

¹¹² Walter Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections* (New York: Schocken, 1969), 92.

Chapter Three

Organizing Paris: Zola's Bawdy Houses of Metaphor

Émile Zola, *Les Rougon-Macquart* (1871-1893)

“Ayez donc les femmes [...] vous vendrez le monde!”

- Émile Zola, *Au Bonheur des Dames*

“Dans cette terrible lutte pour la vie qu’est la littérature,” Émile Zola counsels young writers in 1896, “tout nouveau venu a le besoin de faire la place nette, d’égorger ses aînés, s’il veut pour lui tout le champ, tout l’empire.”¹ Looking back on Zola’s own work in light of the lesson he prospectively proffers to his successors, we might consider by what acts of textual violence he seeks to carve out his place in a literary landscape cluttered with illustrious elders. In situating himself on a self-fashioned battlefield, one whose early skirmishes are marked by recurrent efforts to distinguish himself from his predecessors and affirm the originality of his project, Zola reveals an interventionary impulse that is seemingly at odds with the vision of the naturalist “greffier” who merely records what he sees.²

As we saw in Chapter One, however, Zola’s theoretical writings divide the naturalist’s task into two movements: after the observer “pose le point de départ, établit le terrain solide,” founding a defined place for narrative amidst the unstable space of the unbounded territory, the experimenter “fait mouvoir les personnages dans une histoire particulière.”³ Following Roland Barthes, Janet Beizer has persuasively argued that Zola confronts two alternative modes of reading: showing and telling, mimesis and diegesis.⁴ This, I would like to suggest, is likewise the double-edged sword-pen

¹ “À la jeunesse,” *Le Figaro*, 7 février 1896. In Émile Zola, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Mitterand, vol. 14 (Paris: Cercle du livre précieux, 1970), 724.

² See, for instance, Émile Zola, “Différences entre Balzac et moi,” in *Les Rougon-Macquart*, vol. V, 5 vols., Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1967), 1737 and the theoretical texts compiled in Émile Zola, *Le Roman expérimental*, ed. François-Marie Mourad (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 2006).

³ Zola, *Le Roman expérimental*, 52.

⁴ Janet Beizer, *Ventriloquized Bodies: Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 176.

with which Zola traces his Paris, much like his character Aristide Saccard looking down upon the city in *La Curée* (1872; I explore the comparison below). What David Baguley astutely reads as Zola's "eagerness – or, some would say, rage – to name, classify, fix, stabilize, dominate the external order" is only the first step in a dual process of reproduction and production, of mimetic transcription and literary mobilization of his space and time.⁵ In order to occupy the position of the naturalist novelist who has "l'espace et le temps devant lui [...] sera, en un mot, le maître absolu de sa matière,"⁶ as Zola would have it, the author must not only recreate the lived space in text, but also create it, through the engagement of a method he elsewhere characterizes as "le saut dans les étoiles sur le tremplin de l'observation exacte."⁷ It is this process of establishment, demolition, and construction – of place-making and story-making – that I want to trace here as I examine the role of prostitution in the "creative destruction" (a term I borrow from geographer David Harvey) and destructive creation of Zola's Paris.

"[D]ès ma vingtième année," Zola writes in the Lettre-Préface to the 1884 edition of *Une Page d'amour* (1878), "j'avais rêvé d'écrire un roman dont Paris, avec l'océan de ses toitures, serait un personnage [...]."⁸ If it is in that novel that Zola most explicitly actualizes his adolescent dream, the *Rougon-Macquart* is more generally suffused with a (usually frustrated) desire to capture Paris's essence and expanse, from the wedding party's vertiginous ascent to view the city from the heights

⁵ David Baguley, *Naturalist Fiction: The Entropic Vision* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 190.

⁶ Zola, *Le Roman expérimental*, 157.

⁷ Letter to Henry Céard, 22 mars 1885. In Émile Zola, *Correspondance*, ed. Bard H. Bakker and Colette Becker, vol. V: 1884–1886 (Montréal: Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 1995), 249. In her book which takes its title from Zola's metaphor, Colette Becker terms this style "le réalisme imaginaire." *Zola: le saut dans les étoiles* (Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2002), 90. Stefan Max notes Zola's awareness of the inherent complexity of mimetic representation: "En dépit de ce que peuvent faire croire ses manifestes bruyants, Zola avait compris que si l'œuvre se propose comme but la similitude, c'est qu'elle est sûre d'être vouée à l'échec. Par le préfixe même du mot la reproduction ne fabrique que du faux." *Les Métamorphoses de la grande ville dans les Rougon-Macquart* (Paris: A.G. Nizet, 1966), 10.

⁸ Émile Zola, *Les Rougon-Macquart: histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le Second Empire*, ed. Henri Mitterand, vol. 2, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1961), 1605. The vision of Paris as an ocean is itself redolent of Balzac, whose maritime urban metaphors I discuss briefly in Chapter Four.

of the Vendôme column in *L'Assommoir* (1877) to Claude Lantier's abortive efforts to render Paris panoramically in *L'Œuvre* (1886).⁹ A textual urbanist, Zola imposes on observed Paris an orderly architecture of "larges chapitres, logiquement construits" that apportion his literary landscape into coherent neighborhoods, the twenty volumes that comprise the series echoing the twenty *arrondissements* of the capital after Haussmann's 1860 annexation of its outskirts.¹⁰ In realizing his authorial vision of a textualized Paris in the early years of the Third Republic, however – and especially in a novelistic cycle that endeavors to recount the *Histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le Second Empire* – Zola faces two central challenges: the existing authoritative figurations of the capital by precursors who, as Stefan Max has observed, "avaient presque épuisé le sujet avant lui," and the resistance of the modernizing city to naturalist representation.¹¹ As Zola looks to inscribe the city and make his mark on its cultural landscape, two urban elders loom especially large: Balzac and Haussmann, the most notable authors of literary and lived Paris. Not content to scribble palimpsestically over terrain already charted by others, Zola must bind Balzac's and Haussmann's Paris in text, dispossessing these pretexts of their hegemonic hold on the urban imaginary and preparing the grounds for his own literary capital. In order to found a proper place – and here we will recall Certeau's notion of strategy as a mode of circumscribing space with a synoptic gaze – Zola must dislocate Balzac's dominant Parisian plots and chart another route to urban mastery; he must

⁹ This schema of urban representation precedes and extends beyond the *Rougon-Macquart*: the view from the attic window in *La Confession de Claude* (1865) echoes the *grenier* view that engendered Zola's dream, while the last novel in the *Trois Villes* series, *Paris* (1898), sees Pierre Froment look down from the *butte Montmartre* upon a city "dont la mer immense se déroulait à ses pieds." On the representation of Paris in Zola's *Paris*, see Nicholas White, "Reconstructing the City in Zola's Paris," *Neophilologus* 81, no. 2 (April 1, 1997): 201–214.

¹⁰ Émile Zola, "Notes générales sur la nature de l'œuvre," in *Zola, Le saut dans les étoiles*, by Colette Becker (Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2002), 299. Philippe Hamon also notes the connection in *Expositions: littérature et architecture au XIXe siècle* (Paris: José Corti, 1989), 100.. Hamon has observed to different ends that "Zola organise l'espace de l'œuvre [...] comme Haussmann organisait un quartier de Paris, de façon à ne pas avoir d'angle mort, de façon à ce que lignes de tir et lignes de mire couvrent et balayent l'ensemble de l'espace qui leur est confié." *Le personnel du roman: le système des personnages dans les Rougon-Macquart d'Émile Zola* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1998), 80.

¹¹ Max, *Les Métamorphoses de la grande ville dans les Rougon-Macquart*, 8.

clear a path through the trappings of the Second Empire, imperialistically appropriating the territory he inscribes, in order to claim for himself “tout l’empire.”

Zola’s veneration for Balzac is well-known, as is his anxiety about his elder’s perceived influence on his work.¹² The early preparatory notes for the *Rougon-Macquart* cycle repeatedly make reference to the works of the author Zola admired as an “architecte colossal,”¹³ and betray a striving to “échappe[r] [...] à l’imitation de Balzac qui a tout un monde dans ses livres.”¹⁴ Harvey has argued that Balzac is a “cartographer” who puts his own signature on the map of Paris, a master translator of lived terrain into text whose works not only represent Paris’s present but also project its future.¹⁵ Zola’s self-legitimizing task, then, is to disengage Balzac’s map from the territory it charts and conditions, to “faire la place nette” for the tracing of his own plot(s) onto the city. The prostitute, we will recall from the Introduction, is a favored metaphor for the mapping of Paris in the Balzacian imaginary; for keen urban readers, the narrator of *Ferragus* informs us, the city is intelligible as a “grande courtisane.” In staking a claim to a proper Paris by mobilizing the courtesan to dismantle this anthropomorphic map from within, as we will see, Zola embraces and disperses Rastignac’s challenge at the end of *Le Père Goriot*, simultaneously taking on the task of mastering the capital and reconfiguring “À nous deux, Paris” as a Paris “à nous deux”: a city that is no longer exclusively Balzac’s literary property, that yields to Zola’s own cartographic vision.

Zola’s reflections on Haussmann’s Paris attest a more profound and negatively valenced ambivalence. While as a like-minded literary topologist, Zola respects the sheer scope of the

¹² As Colette Becker has shown, Zola repeatedly betrays a concern in the dossiers for *Nana* that he is not distancing himself sufficiently from *La Cousine Bette*: “J’hésite beaucoup à garder l’intrigue que j’ai trouvée. Elle me semble rappeler un peu trop la situation principale de *La Cousine Bette*.” Zola, 72.

¹³ Émile Zola, “Balzac,” in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Henri Mitterand, vol. 10 (Paris: Cercle du livre précieux, 1966), 924.

¹⁴ Zola, “Notes générales sur la nature de l’œuvre,” 301.

¹⁵ David Harvey, “The Cartographic Imagination: Balzac in Paris,” in *Cosmopolitan Geographies: New Locations in Literature and Culture*, ed. V. Dharwadker (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), 66.

prefect's achievements – “l'œuvre faite est grande. Personne, je crois, ne songe à le nier,” he writes in 1869 – he nonetheless reproaches the “moyens [...] plus ou moins bons, plus ou moins légaux et prudents” by which the emperor and his planner reimage the city.¹⁶ In an 1872 article in *La Cloche*, which appeared shortly after installments of *La Curée* were pulled from the same paper following the 1871 siege of Paris, Zola rails against the “hypocrisy” of Haussmann's urban improvements:

L'Empire ressemblait encore à ces malheureuses qui portent une robe de soie et qui ont des jupons sales, des bas troués et une chemise en lambeaux. Il dorait la bouche des égouts. Son rêve était de badigeonner la ville, de l'aligner, de la mettre en toilette de gala, quitte à la laisser les pieds nus et à cacher chaque déchirure, chaque tache de graisse, sous un nœud de dentelle. [...] Le Paris de M. Haussmann est une immense hypocrisie, un mensonge d'un jésuitisme colossal. [...] Paris, avec un faux râtelier, des fausses nattes, de fausses hanches, minaudait, faisait des grâces à l'Europe. Et c'est pourquoi, le jour où un coup de vent a emporté dents, chignon et tournure, la pauvre ville a grelotté dans ses haillons de soie, blême, amaigrie, comme une cité ivre de champagne qui n'a pas mangé depuis huit jours.¹⁷

Dissimulating the pitiable street whore's tattered underskirts under the courtesan's garish makeup and sumptuous gowns with its “singuliers caprices de propreté,” Haussmannization is, in the young Zola's reading, an exercise in mendacious urbanism, one that fails to eradicate the subjacent tears and stains it covers over with plaster and macadam.¹⁸ Selling a romantic venal redemption narrative worthy of Sue or Dumas, the Empire (as figured in the Zolian imaginary) implicitly participates in the Balzacian construction of Paris as courtesan, one whose gilded and unblemished façade here belies a crack (*fêlure*) that Zola will look to bring to the surface in his account of the period.

¹⁶ *Le Gaulois*, 8 March 1869, Émile Zola, *Œuvres Complètes*, ed. Henri Mitterand, vol. 10 (Paris: Cercle du livre précieux, 1966), 801–805. It is Michel Serres who first characterizes Zola as a “topologue” in *Feux et signaux de brume: Zola* (Paris: Grasset, 1975).

¹⁷ Émile Zola, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. Marie-Ange Voisin-Fougère, vol. 8 (Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2003), 767. Zola had begun publishing *La Curée* in *La Cloche* in September of the previous year, before publication was interrupted in November 1871. On the relationship between Zola's journalistic pieces in the periodical and *La Curée*, see Jann Matlock, “Everyday Ghosts: Zola's *La Curée* in the Shadow of the Commune, 1871-1872,” *Romanic Review* 102, no. 3–4 (November 2011): 321–347.

¹⁸ This recalls Huysmans's description of Marthe's appearance in the brothel in *Marthe, Histoire d'une fille*, which we saw in Chapter One.

A privileged avatar for both Balzacian and (in Zola's vision) Haussmannian Paris, the prostitute embodies the capital, containing the city's semiotic circulation in her anthropomorphic form. In what follows, I argue that Zola likewise turns to the prostitute to write Paris – to make textual sense of a city that resists inscription, but also (and first) to make non-sense of the city of his predecessors. The prostitute, we have seen, was among fin-de-siècle Paris's most conspicuous figures, both in its streets and in its fictions. In the context of the Second Empire, the courtesan is an especially apposite object of naturalist representation, distinctly visible and very much of her time. And yet, despite this topicality, the “putain” significantly figures in Zola's preparatory schema for the *Rougon-Macquart* (alongside the murderer, the priest, and the artist) as belonging to “un monde à part.”¹⁹ Both part of and apart from the world Zola portrays, the prostitute's equivocal alterity with respect to the lived space allows for the textual anchoring of a fluid Parisian topography – the representation of *ce qui est* – while simultaneously abrading the stability of both Haussmann's city and Balzac's metaphorical cartography with her circulation.

The dual movements of destruction and construction of Paris are figured in Zola's epic through the engagement of a shifting lexicon of unregulated and regulated spaces of prostitution that serve to contain the city in metaphor. Redolent of the etymological sense of metaphor as transport, the recurrence of prostitutional tropes – and particularly of spaces of prostitution as metaphors for Paris – invites the Zolian reader to trace out an itinerary between the individual novel-districts of the *Rougon-Macquart*, to read across the boundaries of the books to construct a map of Zola's city. In *La Curée*, Zola binds Balzac's masterful mapping of Paris onto the narrative of Haussmannization, establishing the baseline for a Second Empire city characterized not as a courtesan, but as a burgeoning brothel. Several volumes later, the courtesan reappears in *Nana* (1880), wreaking havoc on the order of Paris's upper classes and accomplishing the imperial project

¹⁹ Zola, “Notes générales sur la nature de l'œuvre.”

that Zola characterizes as Paris's refashioning as a "mauvais lieu." If, as Alain Corbin has noted, "Nana apparaît davantage comme un agent de décomposition que comme une menace," I would argue that this is precisely the point: Nana, as an agent of decomposition, is the necessary, ground-clearing pretext to Zola's recomposition of his own urban order.²⁰ In engaging Nana as his weapon of urban demolition, Zola turns Balzac's literary city against him, cannibalizing "cette grande courtisane" from within; he seizes the parcel of prostitutional disorder set loose by Haussmann's imposition of a transparent order onto the urban landscape and redirects it, activating the prostitute's capacity to "disorganize Paris" with her sex. Zola's literary courtesan disrupts and disperses the capital, as the semiotic remnants of her disorder traverse the volumes of this novelistic cycle that Michel Serres has suggestively termed an "épopée d'entropie."²¹

Prostitution likewise serves as the fulcrum for Zola's assertion of his own urban mastery in *Au Bonheur des Dames* (1883), where the "mauvais lieu" yields to a city re-formed as a "maiso[n] de tolérance du commerce": a metaphor that engages the taxonomic framework of reglementarism in order to bring the modern city under the novelist's purview, to craft a literary structure capable of housing a resistant space and time.²² Unlike Balzac's, Zola's encapsulating frame is not corporeal but rather architectural: the hybrid brothel-"cathédrale" of Octave Mouret's eponymous department store, the uncharted literary site for Zola's (re)writing of the narrative of nineteenth-century Paris.²³ It is by exploiting the prostitute's capacity for urban disruption and destruction, and by adopting the conceptual cartography of official prostitution in order to give form to the debris she generates, we

²⁰ Alain Corbin, *Les Filles de nocé: Misère sexuelle et prostitution au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 2010), 53 n.149.

²¹ Serres, *Feux et signaux de brume: Zola*, 78.

²² Émile Zola, *Au Bonheur des Dames* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), 358. All references are to this edition and will hereafter be cited parenthetically in text (abbreviated as *ABD*).

²³ In a different context, Serres has more generally observed that "[l]e premier arrivé, le vainqueur de la bataille obtiennent pour prix le droit de réinventer l'histoire à leur profit." Michel Serres and Bruno Latour, *Eclaircissements* (Paris: Flammarion, 1994), 78.

will see, that Zola looks to realize his dual project of rendering Paris as it is while simultaneously making it his own.

Le mauvais lieu de l'Europe: Imperial Paris in La Curée

“No literary work takes on the discourse of haussmannization more directly than Zola’s *La Curée*,” Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson has observed, and indeed the second novel in the *Rougon-Macquart* locates the prefect’s reconstruction of the capital squarely at the center of its thematic and spatiotemporal fields.²⁴ Staging “the tension between the stable and the speculative,” in Ferguson’s words, the process whereby “l’immobilier becomes le mobilier,” *La Curée* figures the constitutive ambiguity and fluidity of Haussmannization itself, communicating the lived experience of the continually reimaged imperial city in text by thematizing and narrativizing its inconstancy.²⁵ As such, it establishes the baseline terrain of Second Empire Paris for Zola’s cycle, an urban landscape that will be dismantled and reconfigured in subsequent volumes.

The novel’s coterminous plots convey the Empire’s accelerating and self-fueling lust for gold and pleasure, respectively figured in the two protagonists: Aristide Saccard (*né Rougon*), a speculator who spins the emperor’s plans for urban renewal into a quickly amassed (and quickly dispersed) fortune, and his wife Renée, whose amorous relationship with her stepson Maxime distracts her from her aristocratic ennui. Like so many protagonists before him, Saccard is an upstart provincial, one whose urban ambitions – derisively classified by his brother Eugène as “des rêves de fille” before his discovery of Paris’s future topography orients his narrative and makes him behave as an enterprising “bon enfant” – are predicated upon his preemptive reading of a map not yet reflected

²⁴ Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson, *Paris as Revolution: Writing the Nineteenth-Century City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 125.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

on the territory: here, Napoléon III's plan for the renovation of Paris.²⁶ Saccard is able to become a writer of his own urban narrative only because he is a cunning reader – one whose speculative appropriation of (the) capital, I want to suggest, aligns him with Zola, as both look to poach on the emperor's Paris.²⁷

In what is perhaps the novel's most commented upon scene, Saccard leads his first wife, Angèle, to the window of a restaurant on the buttes Montmartre overlooking the city below, projecting Paris's future onto its present with the slashes of his hand:

Tiens, suis un peu ma main. Du boulevard du Temple à la barrière du Trône, une entaille ; puis de ce côté, une autre entaille, de la Madeleine à la plaine Monceau; et une troisième entaille dans ce sens, une autre dans celui-ci, une entaille là, une entaille plus loin, des entailles partout. Paris haché à coups de sabre, les veines ouvertes, nourrissant cent mille terrassiers et maçons, traversé par d'admirables voies stratégiques qui mettront les forts au cœur des vieux quartiers. (C 106)

In this scene that “folds other panoramas into its site,” as Jann Matlock has argued – most notably, Rastignac's panoramic view from the Père-Lachaise at the end of *Le Père Goriot* – Zola grafts Balzac's narrative onto Haussmann's topography, proleptically charting Saccard's urban subjectivation as contingent on, and complicit with, these earlier plots.²⁸ With “ce coupeau vivant,” “[s]a main sèche et nerveuse [qui] coupait toujours dans le vide,” Saccard delineates the “entailles” that will pierce Paris's flesh and uncover the “entrailles de l'énorme ville,” “crevant Paris d'un bout à l'autre” and preparing the grounds for its regeneration (C 106). As the living city's veins and entrails devolve into a dehumanized grid, Zola eviscerates the sentient metaphors that denoted his predecessors' urban

²⁶ Émile Zola, *La Curée*, ed. Claude Duchet (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1970), 80, 86. All references are to this edition and will hereafter be cited parenthetically in the text (as C). Patrick Bray notes that a plan for Saccard's contemplation of the city from Montmartre does not appear in the preparatory dossier for the novel. Bray's analysis contributed to my own understanding of this pre-mapping. *The Novel Map: Space and Subjectivity in Nineteenth-century French Fiction* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 177.

²⁷ To different ends, Ferguson notes that “[l]ike every writer in this ongoing and increasingly aggressive paper revolution, Zola is a speculator. [...] Zola is and is not Saccard.” *Paris as Revolution*, 132.

²⁸ Matlock, “Everyday Ghosts: Zola's *La Curée* in the Shadow of the Commune, 1871-1872,” 329.

mastery, simultaneously rendering Paris as it was at the time and leaving the city-in-progress unbounded, subject to the intervention of an unforeseen hand.

Transposing Zola's throat-slitting expropriation of his elders onto Paris's landscape, the cuts Saccard gesturally traces unleash the urbanistic fragments that the novel provisionally contains in two evocative metaphors of its own. Observing the noise and activity that bubble up from beneath the new regime's "grand silence de l'ordre," the narrator makes a telling comparison: "Il semblait qu'on passât devant une de ces petites maisons dont les rideaux soigneusement tirés ne laissent voir que des ombres de femmes, et où l'on entend l'or sonner sur le marbre des cheminées. L'Empire allait faire de Paris le mauvais lieu de l'Europe" (C 85). Later in the novel, Saccard expresses a desire to "mettre Paris sous une immense cloche, pour le changer en serre chaude," an ironic assertion of containment and control whose orderly efficacy is belied by the decidedly disorderly encounters between Renée and Maxime in the hothouse attached to the Saccards' home on the Parc Monceau (C 136). Aristide's and Renée's superposed narratives – the commercial and sexual threads with which Zola crafts his fiction of imperial Paris – are readily incorporated into prostitudinal metaphor, staging in story the "hypocritical" Haussmannian city that Zola personifies as a dolled-up whore. By housing the dissipated cells of the Balzacian and Haussmannian courtesans in a metaphorical bawdy house – made penetrable to the naturalist's gaze by the hothouse's glass walls – Zola circumscribes the Paris of his predecessors, allowing for the appropriation of a space outside their purview.

Within the bounds of *La Curée*, these two metaphorical architectures of Second Empire Paris – the hothouse and the whorehouse – remain aspirational, unrealized. A series of images and turns of phrase that recur in *Nana* and *Au Bonheur des Dames*, however, suggest that we read *La Curée* alongside and in dialogue with those later novels, a practice that allows us to trace Zola's progressive destruction and reconstruction of the city as his pen adopts the posture of Saccard's "sword." The

parallels between the *grande dame* Renée and the *courtisane* Nana are striking: Renée is described as “une des reines [...] de ce Paris nouveau” (C 108), “une des colonnes du second Empire [...] qui, en bas et en haut, [...] règn[e] en souveraine” (C 44); Nana similarly “régn[e] tout de suite parmi les plus chères. [...] [L]a foule se retournait et la nommait, avec l’émotion d’un peuple saluant sa souveraine.”²⁹ If Renée can be said to stand in for the city itself – indeed, the novel repeatedly adduces her and Maxime’s affinity with the “nouveau Paris” – Nana will disassemble the hypocritical facade of both the capital and its queen, making patent the layers of artifice that make these functional whores appear as *grandes dames*: “Oui, je vais lui en donner de la grande dame, à ton Paris!” (N 312). The novel likewise thematically engages the plot of *Au Bonheur des Dames*, as the windows of the Saccardian hothouse are alternately likened to the engaging spectacle of the department store windows [“les promeneurs du parc s’arrêtaient, regardaient [...] au travers des glaces si larges et claires qu’elles semblaient, comme les glaces des grands magasins modernes, mises là pour étaler au-dehors le faste intérieur” (51-52); “cet hôtel, aux larges vitrines de magasin” (208)] or to the hybrid whorehouse/temple that will become Mouret’s commercial empire [“C’était la maison suspecte du plaisir mondain, du plaisir impudent qui élargit les fenêtres pour mettre les passants dans la confidence des alcôves” (153); “Cette maison suspecte du plaisir mondain était devenue une chapelle où elle pratiquait à l’écart une nouvelle religion” (208)]. I dwell on this series of parallels in order to suggest that the imperial landscape generated in *La Curée* furnishes the raw material for Nana’s disorganization and Mouret’s reorganization of the city; Zola here not only maps imperial Paris, that is, but also prospectively plots his own appropriation of the city. If the speculative hothouse of Haussmann’s Paris is, in *La Curée*, a “mauvais lieu,” *Nana* and *Au Bonheur des Dames* will reveal the polysemy embedded in that metaphorical turn of phrase; the generic whorehouse is the wrong site –

²⁹ Émile Zola, *Nana* (Paris: Gallimard, 1977), 312. All quotations from the novel refer to this edition, and will hereafter be cited parenthetically in the text (as N).

the “*mauvais lieu*” – for the construction of a Paris that is properly Zola’s. “Bonne fille toujours,” Nana is not only a “good-natured girl,” but also the “right whore” for Zola’s demolition project.

Disorganizing Paris: *Nana*

In *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* (1838-1847), Balzac muses that “[c]e privilège d’être partout chez soi n’appartient qu’aux rois, aux filles et aux voleurs.”³⁰ With an indomitable and multifarious mobility that sees her circulate throughout Paris’s streets and its *demi-* and *grand mondes*, the eponymous heroine of Zola’s *Nana* (1880) would seem to bear out the prostitutional branch of Balzac’s hypothesis.³¹ Where Nana’s body goes, so too does the disorder that she engenders; the debauchery that infiltrates the protagonist’s successive domiciles radiates vertically and horizontally, as Zola’s venal “mouche d’or” contaminates the upper classes and makes of Paris an ever-expanding temple to her sex. From Nana’s theatrical and textual debut in Bordenave’s “bordel,” to the progressive engulfing of the city’s citizens into the orbit of Nana’s circulation, *Nana*’s Paris is rendered as an unbounded *mauvais lieu*, consumed by and with gold and flesh. With the disruptive force of the courtesan’s sex, *Nana* actualizes the Second Empire’s aspirational whorehouse, extending *La Curée*’s memorable metaphor of Paris’s becoming-brothel into the time of narrative.

In a recent article, Steven Wilson has compellingly argued that *Nana* “serves as a textual foundation” or “bedrock” for the narrative construction of *Au Bonheur des Dames*, her prostitutional disorder providing the material that makes the latter novel’s titular shop-machine function.³² While I likewise want to consider *Nana* as pretext and subtext to *Au Bonheur*, I read Zola’s celebrated

³⁰ Honoré de Balzac, *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 2006), 81.

³¹ Balzac’s pithy generalization, it bears noting, belies the particularity of the courtesan’s status among the ranks of Paris’s prostitutes. Registered whores did not enjoy the freedom of movement accorded to the *demi-mondaines*.

³² Steven Wilson, “Nana, Prostitution and the Textual Foundations of Zola’s *Au Bonheur Des Dames*,” *Nineteenth-Century French Studies* 41, no. 1 (2012): 92, 101.

courtesan not only as the ersatz “(grande) dame morte” that lies in the department store’s textual foundation, but also and primarily as the instrument of demolition that clears the ground (“fai[t] la place nette”) on which Zola constructs it – that is to say, the very condition for the construction of the naturalist’s “poème de l’activité moderne.” In what follows, I will show that the nineteenth century’s most famous fictional prostitute fulfills a dual function within the frame of Zola’s “entropic epic”: facilitating the mapping of Haussmann’s resistant city by binding it in text as a “mauvais lieu,” Nana also prepares the subsequent plotting of Zola’s city by disintegrating the imperial map she traces.

Over the course of the Second Empire, as we have seen in previous chapters, the process that would come to be known as Haussmannization introduced a new breed of disorder along with the rigorous order it imposed onto the city’s landscape, destroying and displacing many of the brothels in the center of Paris and inadvertently diverting prostitutional practice into streets, bars, and non-residential *maisons de rendez-vous*. This process of urbanization and the concomitant flourishing of unregistered forms of prostitution subtends Zola’s novel, whose eponymous courtesan ascends to the apex of Parisian celebrity from the depths of poverty in the Goutte d’Or despite (or, more precisely, because of) her status as a “clandestine” prostitute. Nana’s presence is determined by competing perceptual planes: she is the center of Paris’s attention, but dwells largely outside the disciplinary gaze of the reglementarist authorities.³³ In this, she is a typical courtesan (though the courtesan is decidedly different from other types of *filles insoumises*).³⁴ Taking her from an

³³ Larry Duffy similarly remarks that “*Nana* figures the moral degeneration of Second Empire society which, despite its strict regulation of vice, cannot control the ability of ‘insoumises’ to cause social collapse through unhindered sexual circulation, whether this be in high-society salons, at the racetrack, or on the streets.” *Le Grand Transit Moderne: Mobility, Modernity and French Naturalist Fiction* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 127.

³⁴ As Dr. Louis Martineau writes in 1885, the courtesan “fait commerce de son corps, mais peut à la rigueur revendiquer une place à part dans la société. Elle n’est point une machine à plaisir passive [...]. [E]lle peut colorer parfois ses actes d’une nuance de sentiment et, se vendant, avoir la prétention de faire croire qu’elle se donne, et que par conséquent elle n’est point une prostituée.” *La prostitution clandestine* (Paris: Bataille, 1885), 36.

unsanitized and excentric neighborhood on Paris's outskirts to the expansive boulevards of the city's center, the lived narrative of Zola's prostitutional *parvenue* accords the tale of Haussmannization a human form.³⁵ The urban initiation of this once-impooverished *fille*, who drapes herself in piles of gowns and accoutrements and reinvents herself as a "grande dame," recalls Zola's description of the duplicity of Haussmannian Paris, an intertext that leads the reader to anticipate the narrative "coup de vent" that will sweep away the artifice and reveal the tattered rags beneath – a wind that she herself will mobilize as the novel that bears her name draws to a close.³⁶

T.J. Clark has argued that the courtesan "was what could be *represented* of prostitution, and for this to take place at all, she had to be extracted from the swarm of mere sexual commodities that could be seen making use of the streets."³⁷ From the opening pages of the novel that bears her name, Nana's extraction from the sexual masses is made evident by the attention accorded to her name; the courtesan's visibility and identifiable persona makes her apt for naturalist narration, as everyone "voulait [et pouvait] voir Nana" (27). The episode of Nana's cohabitation with Fontan in Montmartre in Chapter Eight nonetheless sees the acclaimed *femme galante* slum as an anonymous streetwalker, dislocated to the spatial and social margins of Paris. It also accelerates the rhythm of her circulation through the urban landscape; in one paragraph, when la Tricon's disinterest leaves Nana to "batt[re] la ville entière" with Satin in search of a site "où donner de son corps," Zola's account of their itinerary delineates a wide-ranging prostitutional map of the capital: the "pavé de

³⁵ In a sense, Haussmannization unblocks the path to Nana's progressive centrality; the wall separating the Goutte d'Or from the city proper was abolished during Haussmann's annexations of 1860.

³⁶ As Rita Felski contends, "In Zola's novel, anxieties about the female body and the modern city merge indistinguishably, as twin zones of social instability which engender the risk of contamination, corruption, and the subversion of law by the tyranny of desire." Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 75. Appropriately, Nana's first apartment is on the boulevard Haussmann, where she occupies "le second étage d'une grande maison neuve dont le propriétaire louait à des dames seules, pour leur faire essayer les plâtres" (N 52).

³⁷ T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 109.

Paris,” the “ruelles boueuses,” the “bastringues de barrière,” the “coins noirs des boulevards extérieurs,” assorted “bals” and “cafés,” Bullier and the “brasseries du boulevard Saint-Michel,” the “rue Notre-Dame de Lorette” and the “quartier Bréda” and, finally, the “grands boulevards,” where the girls have “le plus de chance” (N 273). In choosing the physically and identitarily roving Nana as the subject of his prostitutional fiction – a career courtesan who periodically dabbles in other forms of prostitution – Zola takes a step toward accepting the implicit challenge for naturalist writers of *la fille* and *la ville*: in Christopher Prendergast’s words, “master the varieties of whore and you are close to mastering the variety of the city itself.”³⁸ Rendered persistently identifiable by her celebrity – an alternative sort of *mise en carte*, symbolized in the posters and photographs that bear the courtesan’s name – Nana can circulate amongst the “mass commodities” while remaining representable.

Like the registered prostitutes we saw in Chapter One, however, the unregistered Nana’s deambulations through Paris’s streets are haunted by the menace of the official *mise en carte*, whose power is made manifest by Satin’s arrest and forced registration: “Au mot de police, Nana avait perdu la tête. [...] Déjà elle s’était résignée, en se disant qu’après tout, si on la mettait en carte, elle n’aurait plus cette bête de peur” (N 282). Or again: “Nana, dans son luxe, dans sa royauté de femme obéie, avait conservé une épouvante de la police [...]. On ne savait jamais avec ces gens-là. Ils pourraient très bien les prendre pour des filles [...]” (N 345). Engaging the dormant apparatus of reglementarism to temper Nana’s disorder, Zola’s inscription of the *mise en carte* is a disciplinary tease, a glimpse into the functioning of a prostitutional machine that will resurface in *Au Bonheur des Dames*.³⁹ By leaving that administrative mapping unrealized, however, Zola tempers her circulation with only the naturalist’s cartographic eye, allowing her to disseminate her disruptive force before

³⁸ Christopher Prendergast, *Paris and the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1995), 137.

³⁹ In an important but brief analysis of this scene, D.A. Miller observes that Nana’s “greatest anxiety is apparently inspired by the prospect of being ‘mise en carte’” and links this official censuring to Zola’s representation of his protagonist, contending that “Zola wants to register the Parisian *fille* no less than the police.” *The Novel and The Police* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 21.

bringing her back to the Haussmannian boulevard – that “prototypical stage of venality,” in Charles Bernheimer’s words – where she will once again assume her rightful place as the “marquise des hauts trottoirs.”⁴⁰

Within the textual landscape of Zola’s Paris, the courtesan turns an ambivalent trick. As Zola writes in his preparatory notes for the novel, her sex is “le grand générateur et le grand destructeur,” a commercialized *pharmakon* whose erosive circulation levels the urban playing field and whose body is the substance that generates Zola’s Paris.⁴¹ An anthropomorphic wrecking ball wrought of seduction and spectacle, Nana is “une force de la nature, un ferment de destruction, sans le vouloir elle-même, corrompant et désorganisant Paris entre ses cuisses de neige” (N 224). As Zola writes in his preparatory dossier for the novel, Nana “dissout tout ce qu’elle touche, elle est le ferment, la nudité, le cul, qui amène la décomposition de notre société,” allowing for the mobilization and deployment of her entropic force in order to dissolve the rigid structures of Haussmannified Paris, clearing the cluttered field of a city written and rewritten by Zola’s predecessors so that he may reconstitute it in narrative.⁴² As Anna Coupeau becomes the mononymous Nana, the inversion of her name’s first syllable disjoining its reflective symmetry and setting it into sonic and discursive circulation, she is reborn (*renée*) as a force of prostitutional disobedience, disrupting the Haussmannian city that fuels the meteoric rise of her sovereign sex.

Whereas *La Curée*’s Renée repeatedly laments her lack of that “autre chose” that would assuage her ennui, Nana is explicitly said to be endowed with “autre chose,” which Zola locates as the catalyst of her great works: “c’était avec autre chose, [...] ce rien honteux et si puissant, dont la

⁴⁰ Charles Bernheimer, *Figures of Ill Repute: Representing Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century France* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 96.

⁴¹ Émile Zola, *La Fabrique des Rougon-Macquart: Edition des dossiers préparatoires*, ed. Colette Becker, vol. 3 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2006), 166.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 3:436.

force soulevait le monde, que toute seule, sans ouvriers, sans machines inventées par des ingénieurs, elle venait d'ébranler Paris et bâtir cette fortune où dormaient des cadavres" (453). Focusing on the power of "ce rien honteux and puissant" to "bâtir cette fortune," several critics have convincingly read Nana's discursive bit of nothingness as a veiled placeholder for her inscrutable sex, the generative motor of Zola's narrative fortunes.⁴³ Indeed, the dual resonance of "machine" as both what Nana lacks (machinery designed by engineers) and what Nana has (that ineffable "machine," "ce rien" – an object that is exclusively textual, as it defies precise verbal characterization) further reinforces the sense that the immaterial force of Nana's sexuality has material effects, and prepares the grounds for Octave Mouret's "machine" in *Au Bonheur des Dames*.⁴⁴ I want to emphasize a different aspect of Nana's great works, however: the "ébranlement" of Paris. If, in the *Rougon-Macquart*'s final tome, Docteur Pascal's avowed aim is to "[t]out dire pour tout connaître, pour tout guérir," Nana's driving desire is to "tout avoir pour tout détruire," amassing stacks of expendable lovers and luxury goods as she appropriates and obliterates Paris with the "force de son sexe" (N 346).⁴⁵

In a late scene that marks the apotheosis of Nana's ascent to urban domination, the mapping of her demolition onto the Haussmannian city is made manifest in metaphor, as Mignon expresses his appreciation for her work while visiting her in Muffat's townhome on the avenue Villiers: "Et Mignon, en face de ce monument magistral, se rappelait de grands travaux. [...] Mais ça lui semblait petit, Nana l'exaltait davantage" (453). Favorably comparing the courtesan's Parisian "great works" to the construction of an aqueduct in Marseille and a port in Cherbourg, and equivocally locating

⁴³ See, for instance, the section "Unveiling Nana" in Peter Brooks, *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 124–149.

⁴⁴ *Rien* is similarly equivocal: "nothing," it nonetheless comes from the Latin *rem*, "thing."

⁴⁵ Émile Zola, *Le Docteur Pascal*, ed. Henri Mitterand (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), 183. Rachel Mesch also notes the resonance of the two phrases, to different ends, in *The Hysteric's Revenge: French Women Writers at the Fin de Siècle* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2006), 34.

Nana and the space she inhabits as the “magisterial monument” that lies near the end of Zola’s narrative thoroughfare, Mignon draws the reader’s attention to Haussmann’s renovations (undoubtedly the most prevalent “grands travaux” in the Second Empire imaginary, as well as the source of the city’s own monumentality) in their absence, by dislocating them in discourse. In this central novel of the cycle, Saccard’s imagined “coupeau vivant” morphs into the real article: Nana, *Coupeau*, the finely honed instrument of Zola’s peculiar breed of demolition artistry. As Mignon admiringly remarks, “« Ah! nom de Dieu! quel outil! »” (N 453).

In an inversion of Balzac’s and Hugo’s signature challenges – the self-conquering courtesan who obviates Rastignac’s role in the urban stand-off, as *celle-ci tuera cela* – Nana emerges triumphant from the piles of urban wreckage she leaves in her wake on this “champ de carnage”: “Elle demeurait seule debout, au milieu des richesses entassées de son hôtel, avec un peuple d’hommes abattus à ses pieds. [...] Son œuvre de ruine et de mort était faite, la mouche envolée de l’ordure des faubourgs” (N 457). Initially impervious to the erosive force she vehiculates, “son sexe assez fort pour détruire tout ce monde et n’en être pas entamé,” Nana is however finally subjected to the molecular disorder she foments, as the “tissu cellulaire de cette grande courtisane” (to appropriate Balzac’s image of the city) begins to decay in time with the city itself (N 49).⁴⁶

I want to insist here on the frequency with which Zola refers to Nana’s capacity not only for destruction, but also for disorganization: she “désorganis[e] Paris,” Muffat’s expresses his horror at “la désorganisation apportée par ce ferment” (N 225). It is the courtesan’s heterotopian disorder, at once aligned with and at odds with the spatial paradigm she inhabits, that allows for her mobilization, as she dismantles the map of Haussmannian Paris while faithfully representing the capital as it is. In light of Balzac’s famous metaphorization of Paris in *Ferragus*, Nana is revealed to be a self-conquering and self-consuming “grande courtisane,” devouring and digesting Paris in an

⁴⁶ Honoré de Balzac, *Ferragus / La Fille aux yeux d’or* (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1988), 79.

act of metaphorical anthropophagy that echoes her readerly consumption of the naturalist “histoire de fille” whose pretensions to veracity she mocks.⁴⁷ Her demolition work complete, Nana rapidly disappears from the novel that bears her name. As her disorganizing force is reabsorbed by her body, the courtesan *se dés-organ-ise*, dissolving into a “pelletée de chair corrompue” and a dehumanized “masque horrible et grotesque du néant” (N 474).

In a letter to fellow naturalist writer Henry Céard, Zola asks his friend for help researching Nana’s illness and death, requesting “une géographie générale et exacte” that would allow him to trace his protagonist’s corporeal disintegration with a cartographer’s precision.⁴⁸ This mobilization of a geography of the face invites us to read Nana’s decaying visage as a landscape, one whose textual mapping reflects and inflects Zola’s figuration of Haussmannian Paris. Here we might recall the notion of faciality developed by Deleuze and Guattari: “[L]e visage fait partie d’un système surface-trous, surface trouée. [...] Le visage est une surface : traits, lignes, rides du visage, visage long, carré, triangulaire, le visage est une carte [...]. Or le visage a un corrélat d’une grande importance, le paysage.”⁴⁹ Nana’s decomposing face substantiates the textual decomposition of Haussmann’s illusive façades, as her skin gives way to purulent holes whose corrosive force erodes the surface from within. The smooth contours of her flesh cede to a fissured “croûte rougeâtre” and an “aspect grisâtre de boue,” a facial figuration of the tattered and pocked landscape that lies beneath the stopgap cover of the Empire’s plaster and pavement (N 474). As “Venus decomposes” – as the great courtesan and the urban regime she metaphorically embodies self-destruct – Zola sounds the death knell of the city Nana once held in her thrall, imposing an endpoint on an urbanistic project

⁴⁷ Ibid. On Nana as a reader of her own narrative, see Beizer’s brilliant analysis in *Ventriloquized Bodies*, 174–187.

⁴⁸ Zola, *Œuvres complètes*, 2003, 8:839. Zola would later specify to Céard that he is leaning toward having Nana die of “la variole noire, qui est plus originale, dans l’horreur.” Cited in Zola, *Les Rougon-Macquart: histoire naturelle et sociale d’une famille sous le Second Empire*, 2:1731 n.1.

⁴⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille Plateaux* (Paris: Minuit, 1998), 208, 211.

that extratextually exceeds the limits of the regime and threatens the orderly horizons of this *Histoire naturelle et sociale d'une famille sous le Second Empire*.⁵⁰ Circumscribed in space and in time, and brought down by the courtesan who realizes its metaphorical promise as a “mauvais lieu,” Haussmann’s Paris is semantically dislocated in the novel’s final cry “À Berlin! à Berlin! à Berlin!,” its master planner soon to be reduced to a secondary character in Zola’s urban plot. “Nous en sommes à l’heure de la démolition,” Zola presciently writes in the preface to *Mes Haines* in 1866, “Demain l’édifice sera reconstruit.”⁵¹

Organizing Paris: *Au Bonheur des Dames* (I)

Like so many nineteenth-century novels before it, *Au Bonheur des Dames* (1883) opens with an arrival in Paris: here, Valognes native Denise Baudu disembarking at the Gare Saint-Lazare, ready to “tenter la fortune à Paris” (34). “[E]ffarés et perdus au milieu du vaste Paris,” Denise and her young brothers are immediately confronted with the arresting spectacle of Mouret’s house of pleasures, its vast windows lined with towering heaps of fabrics that spin passersby into desirous consumers-in-the-making. This first and definitive encounter between protagonist and city locates the department store as the novel’s principal landmark, the site that will orient Denise in space and in narrative. If *Au Bonheur des Dames* recounts the second phase of Octave Mouret’s urban arrival – cementing his dominance through the rehearsal of his provisional victory at the end of *Pot-Bouille*, where it is misleadingly said that Octave “avait fini son affaire, Paris était conquis” – it also tells the story of

⁵⁰ Mesch argues that “the only way for Nana to be discursively determined is through her death, which saves Paris from further decay but also saves Zola from the threat of Nana’s subjectivity.” I read Nana’s death instead as a necessary condition for Paris’s sufficient decay. Though I concur that Zola’s ending is required in order to divest the prostitute of her unruly and threatening corporeal force, I will propose that her disorder is extinguished only to be reintroduced in regulated form in *Au Bonheur des Dames*. *The Hysteric’s Revenge*, 36.

⁵¹ Zola, *Œuvres Complètes*, 10:27.

Denise's urban initiation, her semantic and sentimental education that will enable her to read and master the codes of that "ville inconnue" (PB 466).

In a chronicle written five years prior to the publication of *Au Bonheur des Dames*, Zola endows the department store's walls with the capacity to contain the essence of the city, a line of totalizing thinking that foreshadows Mouret's commercial empire: "Aujourd'hui ces maisons de commerce sont des mondes entiers. [...] C'est une ville entière."⁵² Mouret's mastery of Paris's women results from his ability to make of the *Bonheur* a microcosmic city, the diversified goods he divides and proffers echoing the city's various neighborhoods. The novel repeatedly reinforces the association between the *grand magasin* and the "grande ville," metaphorically and metonymically conflating Mouret's store with the city it progressively invades: "le vaste magasin, [...] pareil à une ville, avec ses monuments, ses places, ses rues, où il lui semblait impossible qu'elle trouvât jamais sa route" (81). It is along these lines that I read the department store as Zola's proper Paris; the first to arrive at the *grand magasin* in fiction, Zola is able to reinvent the narrative of the city it contains.

If *Nana* is the novel of the courtesan, and *Pot-Bouille* that of the bourgeoisie's metaphorical "prostitution clandestine," then *Au Bonheur des Dames* is Zola's ode to official prostitution, a classification that may seem paradoxical given the novel's lack of overt figuration of prostitutional activity.⁵³ It is however the lexical and disciplinary machinery of reglementarism that will reinforce the walls of Mouret's vestimentary machine and ensure its proper functioning, textually taming the Parisian "mauvais lieu" as a less ambiguous "maison de tolérance." Indeed, the novel's first detailed description of the shop windows evokes a familiar house of commerce:

⁵² Émile Zola, "La jeunesse française contemporaine (1878)," in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Marie-Ange Voisin-Fougère, vol. 8 (Paris: Nouveau Monde, 2003), 706.

⁵³ Here again I concur with Wilson, who writes that *Au Bonheur des Dames* "celebrates the notion of *controlled* prostitution" (emphasis original). I will complicate this notion, however, in the next section of the chapter. "Nana, Prostitution and the Textual Foundations of Zola's *Au Bonheur Des Dames*," 100.

Il y en avait pour tous les caprices [...]. La gorge ronde des mannequins gonflait l'étoffe, les hanches fortes exagéraient la finesse de la taille, la tête absente était remplacée par une grande étiquette, piquée avec une épingle dans le molleton rouge du col; tandis que les glaces, aux deux côtés de la vitrine, par un jeu calculé, les reflétaient et les multipliaient sans fin, peuplaient la rue de ces belles femmes à vendre, et qui portaient des prix en gros chiffres, à la place des têtes. (33)

The association of these artificial “femmes à vendre” with the thematics of prostitution is patent; “seller and sold in one,” like the prostitute in Walter Benjamin’s famous formulation, the *Bonheur* mannequin is doubly *à vendre*, her image for sale and designed to sell. I want to emphasize here, however, the oblique specificity of Zola’s visual reference to sexual commerce; these are not generic prostitutes. Mouret’s mannequins give new meaning to the appellation “filles à numéro,” the outsized price tags they sport instead of heads (with their “*gros chiffres*”) prominently displayed in the store’s windows like the brothel’s street number (“*gros numéro*”). Having quite literally lost their heads at the moment of their economic inscription, these dehumanized *filles inscrites* realize Nana’s paranoiac “per[te de] la tête” before the looming specter of the *mise en carte*.⁵⁴ Spilling out into the streets by virtue of Mouret’s calculated game of tricks and mirrors, the mannequins make of the store’s exterior an exaggerated and freely accessible brothel salon (*salon de choix*) where women choose not a partner for a *passé*, but rather a more abiding future self.

“La maison de tolérance a ceci de bon,” journalist Ali Coffignon muses in his 1889 treatise *La Corruption à Paris*, “c’est qu’elle ne revêt pas des dehors hypocrites. On ne s’y aventure qu’à bon escient.”⁵⁵ When Zola ventures into the tolerated brothel by means of the vehiculating force of metaphor, with his price-tagged whores and his denotation of department stores as “les maisons de tolérance du commerce,” I would argue that he wittingly engages a reglementarist vocabulary he largely eschews in earlier novels in favor of the more generic “bordel” and “mauvais lieu,” and that

⁵⁴ It is worth noting that Caroline Hédouin, Octave’s first wife, is described in *Pot-Bouille* as “une femme de tête” (34).

⁵⁵ Ali Coffignon, *Paris vivant: La Corruption à Paris* (Paris: Librairie illustrée, 1889), 30.

we might trace this nexus of reglementary signifiers in order to reveal the means by which Zola assures proper functioning of his fledgling city (*ABD* 358).⁵⁶

In his provocative analysis of the *Rougon-Macquart*, Michel Serres observes that “[l]e maître est maître de l’espace. Il peut à la rigueur n’être maître que de l’espace. [...] [L]e maître est topologue.”⁵⁷ In his preparatory notes for *Au Bonheur des Dames*, Zola links the construction of Mouret’s commercial palace with that of his own textual edifice, citing the “drame d’un immeuble longtemps convoité et enfin conquis” as “absolument nécessaire, dans le développement de mon colosse.”⁵⁸ The novel is replete with textual indications of the coextension of these two urban projects, notably in the reprisal of *La Curée*’s urban dynamics. Despite his admonitory note in the preparatory dossier for *Au Bonheur* to “éviter la ressemblance avec Saccard”⁵⁹ in sketching Octave, Mouret’s “science de la femme, qui l’a poussé à spéculer sur la coquetterie de la femme” bespeaks a literary heritage linking these two arrivistes.⁶⁰ As a speculative topologue who smartly chooses to build his fortune not only on Haussmann’s elusive territory, but also on the narrative inscription of the city’s women, it is Octave who finally realizes Saccard’s ambition to enclose Paris under a dome of glass and iron, purifying the presumptive “serre” of its deviant temporality by virtue of the seasonality of the fashions he sells. As Mouret stands ready to conquer Paris’s desirous dames by engaging the baron Hartmann in his expansionist project, he effects a familiar posture: “[Mouret] avait levé son porte-plume, il le brandissait, et il le pointa dans le vide, comme s’il eût voulu percer d’un couteau un cœur invisible. [...] Mouret se jetait en poète dans la spéculation, avec un tel faste,

⁵⁶ The expression does appear once in *Nana*, where Zola refers to the scene observed by Muffat backstage at the theater as “toute cette misère de maison de tolérance” (296-297).

⁵⁷ Serres, *Feux et signaux de brume: Zola*, 293–294.

⁵⁸ Émile Zola, *La Fabrique des Rougon-Macquart: Edition des dossiers préparatoires*, ed. Colette Becker and Véronique Lavielle, vol. 4 (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2009), 56.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 4:68.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 4:52.

un besoin tel du colossal, que tout semblait devoir craquer sous lui” (*ABD* 64).⁶¹ Mouret’s symbolic brandishing of his pen case iterates Saccard’s manual slashing, as the displacement of the denoted object from the Parisian landscape to a woman’s heart is indicative of a significant tactical shift. It is Zola’s own “besoin [...] du colossal” that leads him to dissolve the lived map of Paris through the disorganizing force of the courtesan’s “coquetterie,” staging his own struggle for literary appropriation in the “guerre d’expropriation” between the *Bonheur* and the *Vieil Elbeuf*⁶² that furnishes the novel’s spatial intrigue (tellingly denoted in the *Ébauche* as “La lutte pour la vie”).⁶³

As we saw in Chapter One, the tolerated brothel is the foundation of the reglementarist system prescribed by hygienist Alexandre Parent-Duchâtelet, which sought to channel the unruly flows of desire for prostitutes into the observable, and therefore controllable, “égout séminal.” Designed to channel and house disorder without eliminating it, the brothel is marked by a tenuous equilibrium, a selectively legible order that echoes Mouret’s architectural plan. Trumpeting “le fonctionnement mécanique du *Bonheur des Dames*,” the narrator characterizes the store as “*réglé, organisé avec une rigueur mécanique, tout un peuple de femmes passant dans la force et la logique des engrenages*,” and explains that “il fallait *réglementairement* que les commandes du matin fussent toutes expédiées le soir” (72, 44, 74; my emphasis). The emphasis on the mechanical functioning of the *Bonheur*’s commerce, and especially on the regularity and reglementation of its operation, suggests a reconstruction of the Empire’s self-consuming *mauvais lieu* as a tolerated machine of mass consumption.

⁶¹ Nicholas White provocatively refers to the recurrence as “so unusually Balzacian as to be conspicuous.” “The Lost Heroine of Zola’s Octave Mouret Novels,” *Romanic Review* 102, no. 3/4 (November 2011): 372.

⁶² Zola significantly refers to the *Vieil Elbeuf* in the dossier as “l’ancien commerce de Balzac.” *La Fabrique des Rougon-Macquart: Édition des dossiers préparatoires*, 4:84.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 4:100. Emphasis original.

Domesticating Desire: *Au Bonheur des Dames* (II)

Frustratedly contending with the strategic disposition of the *Bonheur*, Mme Marty complains, “il n’y a pas d’ordre, dans ce magasin. On se perd, on fait des bêtises” (309). A voracious shopper, Mme Marty is also an indiscriminating reader, one who buys into the apparent disorder of the store’s spatial plotting and interprets it as a more pervasive disorder. The selective introduction of disorder into the orderly machine, in the form of women’s desire, is the driving force behind both the *Bonheur*’s triumph and Zola’s urban innovation. Standing before a swirling accumulation of silks and velours that Mouret has artfully arranged, the *Bonheur*’s clients are readily ensnared in his commercial trap by the indomitable force of a desire they believe to be their own: “Des femmes, pâles de désir, se penchaient comme pour *se voir* [...] avec la peur sourde d’être prises dans le débordement d’un pareil luxe et avec l’irrésistible envie de s’y jeter et de s’y perdre” (141).⁶⁴ The narrative dynamics embedded in this scene reflect the secret to Mouret’s success, as the store’s clients come to desire losing themselves in Mouret’s labyrinthine machine. Octave’s evocatively named trademark, the *Paris-Bonheur*, is doubly a “faille”: a sumptuous woven silk that makes women weak in the knees, but also a line of fracture, a susceptible fissure in the fabric of the city itself that allows for the inscription of another space. The sign of both the machine’s lure and its desired result, “Paris-Bonheur” resonates with Octave’s “bonne heure”: the temporal control he exercises in order to master disorder without eliminating it, to satisfy desire without extinguishing it (a strategy that echoes the “tolerant” stance of reglementarism).

If it is the lexicon of reglemented prostitution that Zola mobilizes in order to give form and order to Paris in *Au Bonheur des Dames*, the store’s continually renewed production and deferral of desire nonetheless bespeaks another mode of venal commerce subtending Mouret’s ascent to Parisian mastery. Following Serres, Robert Viti has argued that “besides being the expert *topologue*,

⁶⁴ My emphasis.

Mouret proves to be the master *chronologue* in his ultimate exploitation of his female clients.”⁶⁵ By making his urban hero a conqueror of not only space but time, I will suggest in this last part of the chapter, and by engaging what Beizer astutely reveals to be a model of “desire as the difference between need and (supply and) demand, or in other words, as alienated, externally determined and produced,”⁶⁶ Zola implicitly inscribes within the walls of his department store novel another breed of “activité moderne”: brasserie prostitution.⁶⁷ Projecting a future in which they will stand in for the window’s mannequins, their fleshy curves filling out Mouret’s seductive fabrics, the *Bonheur*’s clients recall the bachelors who sell themselves on their novel-worthiness in the brasseries of the Latin Quarter. As an alternative site where women can be “chez elles,” as Mouret observes, where they can commune with their fashionable sisters as they jointly admire the latest fashions, the “Ladies’ Paradise” replicates the multifarious functions of that men’s paradise, the *brasserie à femmes*. Going against the grain of contemporary prostitution, whereby the faddish *brasseries à femmes* functioned clandestinely as open-access brothels, Zola’s overtly denoted “tolerated brothel of commerce” covertly houses what we might term a *brasserie à dames*, inverting the brasserie’s model in order to inscribe women within its purview. By trafficking in sartorial stories that sell the *Parisienne* a self-serve fiction of her own desire, Zola invents a new prostitutional narrative, one that allows for the creation of a felicitous Paris that is properly his – a textual *Paris-Bonheur* that echoes Mouret’s signature *tissu*.

⁶⁵ Robert M. Viti, “A Woman’s Time, A Lady’s Place: *Nana* and *Au Bonheur Des Dames*,” *Symposium* 44, no. 4 (Winter 1991): 296.

⁶⁶ Janet Beizer, “*Au (delà Du) Bonheur Des Dames*: Notes on the Underground,” *Australian Journal of French Studies* 38, no. 3 (December 2001): 395.

⁶⁷ *Brassage*, mixing or amalgamation of diverse objects, could also describe Octave’s strategic disposition of the *Bonheur*’s *rayons*. It is worth noting that brasserie prostitution is the first form of venal practice to be born of, and come of age after, the Second Empire, making its debut in 1867 at the same Exposition universelle that triumphantly put Haussmann’s feats of urbanism on display. This is also the site and setting of *Nana*’s Parisian debut at the Variétés.

The pleasurable traps of display and deferral that fuel the department store's profits are shared with the brasseries on the other side of the Seine, though Mouret diverts them to the service of female rather than male inscription: "C'était la femme que les magasins se disputaient par la concurrence, la femme qu'ils prenaient au continuel piège de leurs occasions, après l'avoir étourdie devant leurs étalages. Ils avaient éveillé dans sa chair de nouveaux désirs, ils étaient d'une tentation immense, où elle succombait fatalement, cédant d'abord à des achats de bonne ménagère, puis gagnée par la coquetterie, puis dévorée" (*ABD* 111). Octave is well aware of the role of temporal play in his commercial success: "[...] [N]ous attirons toutes les femmes et [...] nous les tenons à notre merci, séduites, affolées devant l'entassement de nos marchandises, vidant leur porte-monnaie sans compter. Le tout, mon cher, est de les allumer, et il faut pour cela un article qui flatte, qui fasse époque" (70). Like the brasserie's clients who dispense modest sums on beer as they bide their time in anticipation of the genuine flattering article – the affections of the whore whose story cements their status as leading men – Mouret's women satisfy their minor desires as they meander through the store in search of those elusive epochal textiles that will crown them queens of Paris. Even the *Bonheur's* "mécanisme des rendus" operates much like the mechanism of gratification and deferral that drives the brasserie's profits. Basking immediately in the gratifying attention of a fawning *fille* without having to commit to his role in the individual whore's story, the brasserie client models the differently intimate *passé* that unites Mouret's client with her fabrics in a make-or-break encounter with little lasting consequence.

The question remains as to Mouret's place in this ersatz arriviste schema. For if Mouret's own desire to master Paris's women aligns him with the "jeunes gens de brasserie et autres Rastignacs"⁶⁸ we encountered in the last chapter, his desire to mobilize and direct *their* desire

⁶⁸ Maurice Barrès, *Sous l'œil des barbares* (Paris: Plon, 1929), 207, <http://artflx.uchicago.edu.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/cgi-bin/philologic/navigate.pl?frantext0509.1956>.

nonetheless bespeaks an affinity with the manager (or indeed the brasserie girl herself): “Mouret avait l’unique passion de vaincre la femme. Il la voulait reine dans sa maison, il lui avait bâti ce temple, pour l’y tenir à sa merci. C’était toute sa tactique, la griser d’attentions galantes et trafiquer de ses désirs, exploiter sa fièvre” (*ABD* 281).⁶⁹ Intoxicating his clients with a play of deferred and diverted attention that mimics the inebriating role of the brasserie’s bocks, and funneling their desires for fabrics and pleasure into profits for the house, Mouret is an authorial planner, one whose architectonic genius lies in the ability to inscribe a narrative into the store’s layout by translating into space the temporal play of the brasserie’s tricks. He realizes Saccard’s speculative dream of a “Paris soûlé et assommé” with the arresting stocks of a fashion house whose available wares enrapture Paris and facilitate “le gallop infernal des millions” (*C* 106). In an uncanny iteration of the headless mannequins whose seductive pose initially stops Denise in her tracks, Mouret’s strategic disposition of the store’s aisles and floors makes real women lose their head, as “ce va-et-vient continuel des clientes les disperse un peu partout, les multiplie et leur fait perdre la tête” (*ABD* 285). Unable to disengage the dilatory space of the hermeneutic desire Mouret authors with his commercial topography, to proceed directly to their desired object “sans même s’être un peu perdue[s],” the *Bonheur*’s clients come back for (and spend) more because of Mouret’s calculated temporal games (*ibid.*).

In the context of this contemporary prostitudinal practice, we might now read what Beizer calls the “bourgeois fairy-tale ending” of the marriage of Denise and Octave as the theoretically unrealizable culmination of the typical brasserie plot.⁷⁰ Mouret not only gets the girl, but also the ladies, as the store he single-mindedly crafts into a monstrous “mangeuse de femmes” assumes full

⁶⁹ Zola notes in the *Ébauche* for the novel that Octave “est bachelier, mais a jeté son diplôme au vent. Il est avec les actifs, les garçons d’action qui ont compris l’activité moderne, et il se jette dans les affaires, avec gaieté et vigueur.” Zola, *La Fabrique des Rougon-Macquart: Edition des dossiers préparatoires*, 4:50.

⁷⁰ Beizer, “*Au (delà Du) Bonheur Des Dames: Notes on the Underground*,” 395.

functioning and produces Denise as a compliant bourgeois fiction. This *arriviste* triumph is however more akin to that of Tabarant's *Anglais* than that of Balzac's Rastignac, as the pleasure of Mouret's conquest quickly yields to a desire to be conquered in turn:

[D]ans ce frisson du triomphe dont tremblait sa chair, en face de Paris dévoré et de la femme conquise, il éprouva une faiblesse soudaine, une défaillance de sa volonté, qui le renversait à son tour, sous une force supérieure. C'était un besoin irraisonnable d'être vaincu, dans sa victoire, le non-sens d'un homme de guerre pliant sous le caprice d'un enfant, au lendemain de ses conquêtes" (491).

The "défaillance" of Mouret's effects another fault line into the paradigm, as Zola's second Ven(de)us(e) takes the upper hand. By transferring the source of desire that allows the machine to function to the headless mannequins and deterritorialized fabrics that line the window and tables of the *Bonheur*, Zola constructs a dehumanized *brasserie à dames*, a self-regulating house of purchasable fictions. It is this innovation, which allows the authorial figure to occupy the position of both author and protagonist without compromising his subjective position by exposing his narrative to the brasserie girl's whims, that facilitates Zola's actualization of his poem of modern commerce; after all, as René Char would muse some seventy years later, "le poème, c'est l'amour réalisé du désir demeuré désir."⁷¹

In an 1877 article devoted to Balzac, Zola admiringly ponders the form of the *Comédie humaine*, that "tour de Babel que la main de l'architecte n'a pas eu et n'aurait jamais eu le temps de terminer."⁷² Implicitly recognizing the courtesan's place in the construction of the master's literary edifice, Zola then mobilizes a spectrum of metaphors familiar to the readers of *Au Bonheur des Dames*: "On va toujours, on se perd vingt fois, sans cesse se présentent de nouvelles misères et de nouvelles splendeurs. Est-ce un mauvais lieu ? Est-ce un temple ? On hésite à le dire. C'est un monde, un

⁷¹ René Char, "Seuls demeurent (XXX)," in *Œuvres complètes*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), 162.

⁷² Émile Zola, "Balzac (Le Messager de l'Europe, janvier 1877)," in *Zola, Le saut dans les étoiles*, by Colette Becker (Paris: Presses de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 2002), 296. The essay opens the collection *Les Romanciers naturalistes*.

monde de création humaine, bâti par un maçon prodigieux qui était un artiste à ses heures.”⁷³ Those who would venture into Balzac’s tower agreeably lose themselves in an array of constantly renewed splendors and miseries, much like Mouret’s clients succumb to his “jolie idée de géomètre” whose forced detours and managed chaos prevent them from proceeding directly to their destination without getting lost (and losing themselves in the fragmented fictions he stages) (*ABD* 285). Balzac’s labyrinthine brothel-temple is the architectural ancestor to Zola’s tolerated brothel-cathedral, though the undecidable alternative of the former is resolved in the department store’s voracious incorporation of both structures and both discourses. In Mouret’s “réalisation moderne d’un palais du rêve, d’une Babel entassant des étages, élargissant des salles, ouvrant des échappées sur d’autres étages et d’autres salles, à l’infini,” Zola forges his own imposing edifice, one whose boundedness he emphasizes in characterizing his “phalanstère du négoce” as a realized dream (*ABD* 297). As the metaphorical nexus that leads the reader from Venus’s decomposition to “le triomphe de Vénus,”⁷⁴ Zola’s mapping of prostitution passes the Balzacian “grande courtisane” through a redemption machine and reworks the Haussmannian city with an architect and an urbanist who possess “l’honnêteté et le courage de ne pas le déguiser sous une couche de badigeon, imitant la pierre ou le bois” (*ABD* 297). The virtual city Zola constructs and encloses within the walls of the department store, a *Paris-Bonheur* whose triumph hinges on the subjection of the brasserie’s brand of unruly narrative to the delimiting force of reglementarist metaphor, attests the extent of the prostitute’s imbrication in the mythology and topology of fin-de-siècle Paris, revealing the venal woman’s body to be very much alive in the foundations of the *Rougon-Macquart*.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Zola, *La Fabrique des Rougon-Macquart: Edition des dossiers préparatoires*, 4:68.

Chapter Four

Occupying Paris: Streetwalking and Disobedient Narrative

Charles-Louis Philippe, *Bubu de Montparnasse* (1901)

L'amour peut dériver d'un sentiment généreux: le goût de la prostitution;
mais il est bientôt corrompu par le goût de la propriété.
- Charles Baudelaire¹

Late on the evening of July fifteenth, the boulevard Sébastopol slowly comes back to life, its sidewalks strewn with festive remnants of the previous night's celebrations. Though the stores are closed, a "vie nocturne [...] vit tout entier sur le trottoir," "avec d'autres buts" than the daytime commerce it succeeds. The boulevard is erratically illuminated by streetlights and the lanterns of carriages and trams that roll through without stopping on their way to the *Grands Boulevards*, hurrying toward the light "comme des personnes qu'un spectacle attire." A shrewd but distractible observer, our narrator records the manifold objects and bodies that pass by and capture his attention, his discursive turns keeping time with the rhythm of the street's pedestrian ebbs and flows. We listen in on the thoughts of friends and lovers as they cross through our field of vision in a continually renewed parade of boasts and bodies. Prostitutes ply their trade on the sidewalk; one or two are singled out with a tour guide's denotative "voici," as the moral police, unstirred, stroll by in pairs. In short, "c'est le spectacle ordinaire de tous les soirs," a declaredly banal and seemingly inauspicious novelistic beginning. We do not immediately notice that the eponymous protagonist of Charles-Louis Philippe's *Bubu de Montparnasse* (1901) is absent from the scene.²

I dwell on the opening tableau of this forgotten novel precisely because it seems to present nothing worth dwelling on. Though several aspects of the scene recall the first chapter of Zola's *Nana* – the time of day, the "spectacle," the repetition of a key phrase (Philippe's "boulevard

¹ Charles Baudelaire, "Fusées (1)," in *Œuvres posthumes* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1908), 76.

² All citations in this paragraph are from Charles-Louis Philippe, *Bubu de Montparnasse*, ed. Bruno Vercier (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1978), 47, 48, 51, 48. All references to the novel are to this edition and will hereafter be cited parenthetically in the text.

Sébastopol” and “au lendemain du Quatorze Juillet,” Zola’s “Nana”) – the focused urgency that unremittingly directs the reader to Nana on Zola’s diegetic horizon yields in *Bubu* to a fissured field of attention, an assemblage of narrative threads lacking cohesion or consistent orientation.³ After all, the narrator tells us, “[l]e but n’est pas ici, boulevard Sébastopol” (48). Rather than follow the *tout-Paris* who head toward the light at nightfall in search of “quelque jouissance dont ils pourraient s’emparer” – one almost wonders if *La Blonde Vénus* is playing down the street at the Variétés – *Bubu*’s narrator remains in the shadows with “ceux qui sont pauvres, ceux qui sont laids et ceux qui sont timides:” the generic array of whores, street peddlers, and minor functionaries who “cherchent dans les coins quelque débris qu’on leur aura laissé,” littering the boulevard like a hungover and held-over “reste de fête” that “Paris passe et traîne” after the festivities end (49, 48).⁴ The grand courtesan who consumes Paris with her charm and her sex is nowhere to be found in *Bubu*’s opening tableau, which lingers instead on the disorganized urban detritus she leaves in her wake: a dismantled and circulating cityscape that will here be emblemized by the “rebut de la prostitution,” Paris’s street prostitutes.⁵

³ Vercier observes other similarities between the two novels in his introduction to *Bubu*; Bruno Vercier, “Introduction,” in *Bubu de Montparnasse*, by Charles-Louis Philippe, ed. Bruno Vercier (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1978), 19 n.3. The comparison between Philippe and Zola (here *Bubu* and *L’Assommoir*) is also adumbrated in Monique Puget, “De Zola à Charles-Louis Philippe: *Bubu de Montparnasse*,” *Les Cahiers Naturalistes* 42, no. 70 (1996): 170–177. The opening tableau of *Bubu* is likewise reminiscent in tone and rhythm of the opening of Leo Tolstoy’s “Sebastopol in December,” an account of the Crimean War battle that inspired the Parisian boulevard’s name. Tolstoy’s beginning captures the break of day over the city that is the Parisian boulevard’s namesake (“L’activité du jour remplace peu à peu du côté nord la tranquillité de la nuit”). Philippe was an avowed admirer of both Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, whose novel *The Idiot* (1869) *Bubu* adduces later in *Bubu*. Leo Tolstoy, *Les Cosaques; Souvenirs de Sébastopol* (Paris: Hachette, 1886), 175.

⁴ That the novel’s opening scene insists on both the debris strewn about the streets and the desires for festive prolongation among “ceux qui ont joui d’hier” – and that it repeats “au lendemain du Quatorze Juillet” and “le soir du quinze juillet” three times over the course of the first few pages – invites a consideration of Mikhail Bakhtin’s notion of the carnival as “celebrat[ing] temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order” and “mark[ing] the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions.” In situating *Bubu* immediately after the carnivalesque holiday ends, Philippe emphasizes the return to the established order whereby everything is in its place (or, in the case of the *pauvres, laids et timides*, in its non-place: the boulevard). Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Hélène Iswolsky (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984), 10. If there is indeed common ground to be found in the carnival’s liberation of the *bas corporel*, Philippe (as we shall see) nonetheless locates his *lieux communs* elsewhere, and after the party is over.

⁵ Ali Coffignon, *Paris vivant: La Corruption à Paris* (Paris: Librairie illustrée, 1889), 110. Coffignon likewise notes that of all the hotspots of street prostitution, “Le boulevard Sébastopol [...] c’est peut-être le plus considerable. Les filles y sont

Amid the swirl of sound bites and stereotypes that constitute *Bubu's* first pages, only two figures are accorded the distinction of narrative appellation: “la petite Gabrielle” and “la petite Jeanne,” street whores drawn from a noisy crowd gathered near les Halles and endowed with a few lines of backstory.⁶ In a dynamic that will recur throughout Philippe’s novel, the initial featuring of these atomized, banal remnants of Zola’s sovereign courtesan belies their diegetic inconsequentiality.⁷ Gabrielle and Jeanne are brought forth only to be swiftly re-assimilated into the group of common whores, who call out to potential clients like “des grenouilles qui coassent auprès d’un marais” but fall silent when moral agents pass by with a vigilant stare. Their potential distinction – the persona that would make them capable protagonists – is then neutralized by the need to dissemble their difference under a compliant frame: “passe[r] raides, sans tourner la tête, avec leur âme d’esclave qui sait que la raison du plus fort est toujours la meilleure” (51, 52). Philippe’s nocturnal boulevard tableau stages the push-and-pull of the city’s marginal merchants who fight to attract attention selectively, to stand forth from the crowd as they ply their wares without standing out to the authorities.

The courtesan, we will recall from the last chapter, was (in the words of T.J. Clark) “what could be *represented* of prostitution,” and this representation was contingent upon her “extract[ion]

légion; il y en a de tout âge, de toute apparence, en cheveux, en chapeau, en tablier, avec ou sans gants, etc.” (115). In standing alongside these belated urban interlopers, Philippe resists adopting the discursive position of many contemporary observers, whose view Hollis Clayson usefully summarizes: “Various commentators [...] reported that bands of predatory lower-class women regularly invaded the grands boulevards, which were the pride of fashionable Right Bank Paris. [...] On the one hand, [such accounts] describe the increasingly open forms of sexual commerce that characterized the urban erotic economy in the years following the Commune; on the other hand, they are also symptomatic of the chimerical neoregulationist disquiet about the takeover of the city by clandestine prostitutes.” *Painted Love: Prostitution in French Art of the Impressionist Era* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications, 2003), 94.

⁶ The area around the Halles was one of the two principal districts for clandestine street prostitution during the first decades of the Third Republic, as Coffignon attests. *Paris vivant: La Corruption à Paris*, 111–112.

⁷ Philippe writes: “Voici la petite Gabrielle qui vécut deux ans avec Robert, l’assassin de Constance. Son amant vient de partir aux travaux forcés. Voici la petite Jeanne qui doit avoir dix-sept ans. Depuis le mois dernier, elle se promène boulevard Sébastopol. Elle n’a sur le visage qu’un peu de poudre de riz et ses yeux brillent des premiers feux du plaisir. Beaucoup de gens ne la prennent pas pour une prostituée” (50–51).

from the swarm of mere sexual commodities that could be seen making use of the streets.”⁸ And yet, these “mere sexual commodities” – the clandestine street whores who “make use” of the boulevards of fin-de-siècle Paris – are the prostitutes figured in Philippe’s novel, and those that will concern us here. The focus of reglementarist anxieties, street prostitution (or *le trimard*) incites contradictory fears: of a brazen distinction that threatens to deflect susceptible viewers from the path of respectability, and of a superficial sameness that would couch the prostitute’s fateful difference under an unintelligible frame.⁹ It is “errante et multiforme,” as Octave Uzanne laments; “[i]l est impossible de [la] localiser; elle se rencontre partout; des femmes *font la retape* à deux pas des grands boulevards aussi bien qu’aux fortifications.”¹⁰ The recognition of the *fille de trottoir* as such – here dependent on the individual’s capacity for discernment, as the unbounded space of the street is itself (unlike the brothel or the brasserie) an unreliable indicator of identity for those who occupy and traverse it – is troubled by her visual indistinction from the honest woman.¹¹ Even the registered *fille isolée en carte* bears no outwardly perceptible marker, no outsized number or other sign that would identify her to the casual observer as a “public” whore.

⁸ T. J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 109. Clark refers here to modernist painting, but as we saw with regard to *Nana* in Chapter Three, the *fille/courtisane* distinction pertains in narrative fiction, as well.

⁹ This is the crisis of distinction that drives Barbey d’Aureville’s “La vengeance d’une femme,” where a streetwalker catches dandy Robert de Tressignies’s eye precisely because of her resemblance to – and, we learn, identity as – a respectable woman: the duchesse d’Arcos de Sierra-Leone. Jules Barbey d’Aureville, “La Vengeance d’une femme,” in *Les Diaboliques*, ed. Jacques Petit (Paris: Gallimard, 2003).

¹⁰ Octave Uzanne, *Études de sociologie féminine: Parisiennes de ce temps en leurs divers milieux, états et conditions*. (Paris: Mercure de France, 1910), 357, 366, <http://archive.org/details/tudesdesociolo00uzanuoft>. Emphasis original. Police prefect C.J. Lecour similarly observes that “les prostituées insoumises, c’est-à-dire *non inscrites*, [...] sont partout [...]. Jusqu’à une heure avancée de la nuit, elles circulent, nombreuses, sur les plus beaux boulevards, au grand scandale du public, qui les prend pour des prostituées inscrites en infraction aux règlements, et qui, dès lors, s’étonne de l’inaction de la police à leur égard.” C.J. Lecour, *La Prostitution à Paris et à Londres, 1789-1871* (Paris: P. Asselin, 1872), 144–145.

¹¹ Like the other prostitutes we have studied, the street prostitute had several common epithets in period parlance: the *fille de trottoir* or *trotteuse*; the *trimardense*; the *pierreuse*; the *fille des garnis* (named for the *hotel garni* where she turned her tricks); the *racoleuse* or *raccrocheuse* (both terms refer to the prostitute’s solicitation of her client).

As such, street prostitution is not as readily instrumentalized as other modalities of venal practice, in which the prostitute's taxonomically attributed type allows her to be localized in space and in text. The street prostitute's spatial and identitary mobility poses a threat to authorial and administrative mastery during the Third Republic, testing the purview of a disciplinary order predicated upon defining the prostitute and keeping her in her allocated place.¹² As a liminal space of prostitutional practice where *filles soumises* and *filles insoumises* coexist, the street abrades the stability of reglementarist logic; street prostitution's ranks span the spectrum from young girls just starting out in the trade and waiting to be recruited into more secure forms of prostitution, to formerly registered prostitutes *en rupture de ban* who find respite and cover amongst the masses of "sexual commodities" in the streets, to desperate whores such as Tabarant's Alphonsine whose appearance or health prevents them working in a *tolérance* or a brasserie.¹³ As their name implies, clandestine streetwalkers are perceived as an undifferentiated mass of impersonal and interchangeable whores who must be plucked from the streets in order to be made the stuff of story; both in practice and as metaphor, the street prostitute offers no surmountable resistance, no deferral of desire or staged drama of seduction that would make the encounter's consummation a triumph for her client. If, in *Bubu*, Paris is still characterized as "un chien las qui court après sa chienne," the object of its weary affections is no longer a unified courtesan, but rather an atomized assemblage of common *trotteuses* whose individual "conquering" hardly registers on the map (50).

¹² As Ali Coffignon writes: "Dans la rue, deux catégories de femmes opèrent de la même manière: les filles inscrites à la Préfecture de police et les prostituées clandestines. Il est très difficile de reconnaître les unes des autres; j'ajouterai qu'il en est de si habiles, de si rouées, qu'il faut une observation patiente et sagace pour se convaincre que ce ne sont pas d'honnêtes filles." *Paris vivant: La Corruption à Paris*, 109.

¹³ As Corbin writes of "les filles des garnis qui racolent dans la rue," "C'est au sein de ces catégories que se recrutent directement les filles soumises et que se réfugient la majorité des disparues." *Les Filles de noce: Misère sexuelle et prostitution au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 2010), 206. In an 1897 study on clandestine prostitution, Oscar Commenge observes "l'envahissement et l'encombrement des rues par les prostituées de toutes les catégories." *Hygiène sociale: La prostitution clandestine à Paris* (Paris: Schleicher frères, 1897), 115.

And yet, I will argue in this chapter, it is precisely the clandestine streetwalker's perceived ubiquity and resistance to *localisation* – containment, specification, location – that makes her ripe for literary mobilization in *Bubu de Montparnasse*. Brokered on the boulevard and consummated in rent-by-the-trick rooms (*garnis*), clandestine street prostitution is a practice of making do, an improvisational transaction without a proper milieu. Working the city's most central streets, the marginal clandestine streetwalker nonetheless operates “comme si le trottoir était [sa] propriété particulière,” in the words of Charles Virmaître, infracting the order of the urbanistic and reglementarist grid by turning tricks on – without submitting to – the prescribed spatial, conceptual, and juridical territory (*ban*) accorded to prostitutes by the *mise en carte*.¹⁴ This, I want to propose, is the means by which Philippe maps Paris without mastering it, without access to the topographical or semiotic heights that would enable a synoptic gaze: in Certeau's formulation, “à partir des seuils où cesse la visibilité[, où] vivent les pratiquants ordinaires de la ville.”¹⁵ Though Philippe's novel stages the time-worn paradigm of Balzacian mastery of a Paris distilled as a dominable woman, as we will see, it evinces the impracticability of that model for those aspirational parvenus without capital or connections, who are left to grapple for scraps of minor satisfaction on street corners after the ambitious have begun their urban climb. For these figures, like *Bubu's* protagonist, the streetwalker serves not as a unifying metaphor for Paris, but rather as a metonymical lobe of its “tissu cellulaire,” one whose practice of space provides a model for a mapping of the impoverished subject that is not contingent on the appropriation of (her as) territory.¹⁶ If, as I have shown, Zola's literary

¹⁴ Charles Virmaître, *Trottoirs et lupanars* (Paris: H. Perrot, 1893), 86, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k54328072>. This further distinguishes clandestine street prostitution from clandestine brasserie prostitution, as the *brasseries à femmes* were implicitly integrated into the *ban* of acceptability by the 1880 law according “commercial freedom” to bars. I discuss the law in Chapter Two.

¹⁵ Michel de Certeau, *L'Invention du quotidien, 1. Arts de faire*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), 141. In a preface to *Bubu's* English translation, T.S. Eliot would refer to the novel as “a symbol of the Paris of that time.” “Preface,” in *Bubu of Montparnasse* (New York: Shakespeare House, 1951), 3.

¹⁶ The reference is to Balzac's *Ferragus*, which I discuss in the Introduction.

construction of Paris engages the taxonomic architecture of reglementarism, we might say that Philippe adopts an aesthetics of clandestinity: a flatly compliant inscription of Paris's commonplaces (and common prostitutes) that does not reverse the paradigm of mastery, but rather disrupts it, reconfiguring the literary map of Paris by occupying it from its margins. By superposing two narrative cartographies – modes of mapping figured in the novel as that of the pimp and that of the streetwalker – *Bubu* effects what Jacques Rancière calls a “dérèglement de l'ordre légitime du discours,” calling into question the place of the prostitute, the writer, and the reader in fin-de-siècle Paris and its fictions.¹⁷

Untimely Arrivals, or “Un [petit] homme de province à Paris”¹⁸

At first glance, the plot of *Bubu* offers few indications of a displacement of the traditional realist/naturalist plot of urban mastery, staged here in the form of a struggle between a Vautrin-like pimp and an aspiring fin-de-siècle Rastignac. Inspired by Philippe's tormented, intermittent affair with a young prostitute named Maria Tixier – indeed, as Bruno Vercier observes, the author “invente peu”¹⁹ –, *Bubu* recounts the Parisian travails of Pierre Hardy, a recently arrived provincial of modest means who works by day as a railroad designer and studies at night for the *Ponts et Chaussées* exam in the hopes of becoming a city surveyor.²⁰ As he wanders along the boulevard Sébastopol after shutting his books, Pierre encounters a florist-turned-prostitute named Berthe Méténier, whom he begins to see regularly as much for her company as for her sex. When she meets Pierre, Berthe

¹⁷ Jacques Rancière, *La chair des mots: politiques de l'écriture* (Paris: Galilée, 1998), 125.

¹⁸ The title of this section makes reference to “Un grand homme de province à Paris,” the title of Part II of Honoré de Balzac's *Illusions perdues* (1836-1843).

¹⁹ Bruno Vercier, “Le Paris de Charles-Louis Philippe,” in *Errances et parcours parisiens: de Rutebeuf à Crevel*, ed. Jeannine Guichardet (Paris: Service des Publications de la Sorbonne Nouvelle, 1986), 94.

²⁰ On Philippe's life and works, see Simone Raynaud, *Charles-Louis Philippe (1874-1909): le regard pénétrant du coeur* (Prémilhat: ATP, 1996); Vercier, “Introduction”; and Vercier's recent Bruno Vercier, *La mauvaise fortune: Charles-Louis Philippe* (Paris: Gallimard, 2011).

has lived for four years with Maurice Bélu (*dit* “Bubu”), her lover and pimp, who encouraged her to become a prostitute early in their relationship after he tired of manual labor. Berthe soon learns that she has contracted syphilis (which she transmits to both Pierre and Bubu) and is interned in the Broca hospital; in the meantime, Bubu, unable to provide for his own needs without Berthe (his “*pain quotidien*”), is arrested and jailed for stealing from a tobacco shop. Still symptomatic upon her release from the hospital and adrift without Bubu’s guidance, Berthe returns to prostitution, working the streets with her sister Blanche and engaging in short-lived liaisons with a string of stand-in pimps. Desperate for money and a place to stay after Blanche is taken to the prison-hospital for prostitutes, the Saint-Lazare, Berthe turns to Pierre, who takes her in and attempts to lead her back to the path of virtue. Though she briefly abandons prostitution in favor of a return to the florist’s *atelier*, her stint as an honest woman is short-lived; a newly-paroled Bubu turns up in the middle of the night and forcefully whisks her away as Pierre watches helplessly, unable to summon the courage to intercede.²¹

Characterizing Philippe as “the poet of the poverty of the small-town petty bourgeois,” György Lukács diagnoses his work as uniquely infused with and actuated by a “state of longing,” a “profound sense of union which yet is eternally a being-separate, a standing-outside.”²² In the case of *Bubu*, that particularly Philippean “longing” is thematically staged as Pierre Hardy’s desired assimilation into a Paris inhospitable to the poor and the weak-willed, a union contingent upon his ability to find a partner amidst a sea of disinterested Parisian women. Here, of course, Philippe

²¹ The florist’s atelier, as we saw in the case of Huysmans’s *Marthe*, was itself thought to be a den of “basses mœurs.” On this and other “Suspicious Professions,” see Hollis Clayson’s chapter of that name in *Painted Love*, 113–154.

²² György Lukács, “Longing and Form: Charles-Louis Philippe,” in *Soul and Form*, ed. John T. Sanders and Katie Terezakis, trans. Anna Bostock (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 119, 112. Critics of the novel (and of Philippe’s fiction more generally) have long read it in the context of his biography. As Jacques Migozzi observes with respect to *Bubu*, “Il y a beaucoup de Charles-Louis Philippe [...] dans ces portraits jumeaux [de Pierre et de Louis].” Jacques Migozzi, “Figures et voix du peuple dans *Bubu de Montparnasse* (1901) de Charles-Louis Philippe,” in *Problèmes de l’écriture populaire au XIXe siècle*, ed. Roger Bellet and Philippe Régner (Limoges: PULIM, 1997), 216.

appropriates an established plot; Pierre's accession to narrative primacy from amidst the crowds of castoffs on the Sébastopol locates *Bubu's* breed of longing within a familiar paradigm. Schematically speaking, Pierre is well-bred for urban protagonism, as he fits the profile of an illustrious lineage of young literary heroes in the making: the son of a poor but industrious timber merchant from the provinces, Pierre is a naïve bachelor who moves to Paris in pursuit of career advancement and a sentimental education, armed only with hope, a diploma, and a silver medal commemorating his achievements in professional school. Inflecting Balzacian arrivisme through a fin-de-siècle, Barrèsian "uprooting" (and through his own experience as a provincial transplant to the capital²³), Philippe renders Pierre as an ingenuous outsider, overwhelmed by the incoherent stimuli of an urban "multitude dont il ne fai[t] pas partie" and – for readers conversant with this *topos* – ripe for narrative initiation and formation (55).²⁴

Devoid of aspirations to Parisian prominence, however, and driven only by a desire for female companionship and a modest intention to "*arriv[er]* au grade de chef de bureau," Pierre is an impoverished arriviste (55, my emphasis).²⁵ "À cause de l'amour qui remue les hommes à vingt ans, et à cause de Paris, qui est dur aux pauvres," as the narrator platitudinously muses, Pierre lacks the vertical mobility that occasions his predecessors' ascent to mastery from the morass of urban indifference (114). Pierre's poverty, made manifest in the long hours he allocates to work and study

²³ Philippe's posthumously published letters to his Belgian friend Henri Vandeputte, written between 1896 and 1907, are an invaluable critical resource, providing keen insight into Philippe's relationship with Maria, his joys and frustrations in Paris, and the conception and gestation of *Bubu*. With a few salient exceptions here and at the end of the chapter, however, I have elected to avoid reading the novel through the letters, addressing it instead as a work of fiction. Charles-Louis Philippe, *Lettres de Jeunesse à Henri Vandeputte* (Paris: Nouvelle Revue Française, 1911).

²⁴ Philippe's description of Pierre's work habits – "Dans sa chambre, il étudiait avec une volonté de Lorrain qui veut arriver, mais sans enthousiasme parce que l'étude des jeunes gens solitaires n'est pas bonne" – would seem to be an ironic *clin d'œil* to Barrès's seven *Lorrains* in *Les Déracinés* (138). I discuss Barrès's novel in Chapter Two. Though he does not make note of the intertextual referentiality that ties Philippe to Barrès, Jacques Migozzi argues that Philippe's novel articulates a critique of the Third Republic's educational system (which Barrès identifies in *Les Déracinés* and elsewhere as the source of the *bacheliers'* urban anomie). Migozzi, "Figures et voix du peuple dans *Bubu de Montparnasse* (1901) de Charles-Louis Philippe."

²⁵ For Migozzi, Pierre's modest career ambitions reflect a certain "modestie et [...] vertu sociale républicaine." Ibid., 215.

– true literary *bacheliers*, as we saw with respect to Barrès and Tabarant in Chapter Two, rarely devote their time to schoolwork – precludes access to the Balzacian model, which Philippe would invoke more explicitly one year later in another Parisian novel, *Le Père Perdrix*: “On a beaucoup parlé de l’arrivée du jeune homme à Paris, qui monte sur la colline au matin, coudoyé par deux millions d’espérances, regarde à ses pieds le heurt de toutes les civilisations de France, le domine et sourit au massacre comme un capitaine de vingt ans.”²⁶ Captain of nothing, and animated not by two million hopes but rather more modestly by “mille désirs” and “deux ou trois cents petites émotions,” Pierre ascends only the five flights of stairs that lead him to a “vie sans dignité” in a furnished room he rents for twenty-five francs a month (85, 59, 56). Without disposable time or income, and without a place of his own, Pierre is at work in the morning as Rastignac affirms his urban dominance.²⁷ Though ostensibly the novel’s leading man, Pierre is figured as an inchoate subject; even his “proper” name, Pierre Hardy – an exaggerated assertion of strength and tenacity, joining the substantive force of *pierre* (“stone”) with the willful complement *hardi* (“bold,” “daring”) – is improper, both contrasensical (with respect to his diffident character) and common (extratextually and within the novel, whose pages are strewn with plural and generic “pierres”).

Whereas his Balzacian and Barrèsian predecessors are propelled forward toward their goals by ambition, grand ideas, and interpersonal connections, Pierre is set identitarily adrift by Paris and its *Parisiennes*, a contrast elucidated in the images and tropes deployed to describe Paris in *Le Père Goriot* and *Bubu*. In Balzac’s novel, Paris is repeatedly characterized as an ocean (“un véritable

²⁶ Charles-Louis Philippe, *La mère et l’enfant; Le père Perdrix*, ed. Bruno Vercier (Paris: Gallimard, 1983), 264.

²⁷ As Alain Faure and Claire Lévy-Vroelant note, “le garni n’était pas considéré en général comme un vrai domicile.” Alain Faure and Claire Lévy-Vroelant, *Une chambre en ville: Hôtels meublés et garnis de Paris 1860-1990* (Paris: Créaphis, 2007), 121. If, as Faure observes, “les héros de la *Comédie Humaine* y trouvent souvent leur premier logement en arrivant à Paris,” the *garni* is for them never a home but a temporary landing, an inhospitable abode to abide only until (as Barrès would have it) “l’homme [...] s’est [...] fait la vie qu’il mérite.” Ibid., 13. This, we will recall, is Barrès’s primary justification for the *brasserie à femmes*. Philippe’s narrator similarly remarks that “Les pauvres locataires des hôtels meublés n’ont pas de chez soi”; we will return to Pierre’s non-home later in the chapter (56).

océan,” “un océan de boue”), one that Rastignac gradually learns to navigate as he becomes conversant with the city’s codes (“Il avait ainsi quinze mois pour naviguer sur l’océan de Paris, pour s’y livrer à la traite des femmes, ou y pêcher la fortune”).²⁸ The vision of Paris as ocean establishes the city as a space that is multidimensional and multidirectional, endowed with both breadth and depth – and one that is accordingly, I propose, a vessel for both metonymy and metaphor. Though the terms of the metaphorical equation of city to sea are fixed, the meaning is not; as Rastignac moves through Paris and through narrative, the ocean that first connotes mystery comes to signify mastery, its initial depth mirrored by the height of the protagonist’s defiant stand at the Père Lachaise. The axis of horizontality that propels the narrative forward in time is joined to an axis of verticality that allows for Rastignac’s (and Balzac’s) elevation and assimilation of Paris under a synoptic gaze, which renders the boundless ocean-city masterable by segmenting it into manageable parcels. At the end of *Goriot*, this taming of the ocean is made manifest by Rastignac’s descending gaze over the city, which casually captures the capital as a whole (“vit Paris tortueusement couché le long des deux rives de la Seine”) but – oriented by the river’s banks and the city’s monuments – quickly focuses in on the target section (“[s]es yeux s’attachèrent presque avidement entre la colonne de la place Vendôme et le dôme des Invalides, là où vivait ce beau monde dans lequel il avait voulu pénétrer”).²⁹ Here, the river is a sign of an ocean provisionally mastered from above, of a city whose dispersed metonymical details coalesce into a conquerable and penetrable metaphor of Paris as woman.

²⁸ Honoré de Balzac, *Le Père Goriot*, ed. Philippe Berthier (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1996), 54, 124. Balzac renders this ocean of Paris as bottomless for its writers: “Mais Paris est un véritable océan. Jetez-y la sonde, vous n’en connaîtrez jamais la profondeur. Parcourez-le, décrivez-le: quelque soin que vous mettiez à le parcourir, à le décrire ; quelque nombreux et intéressés que soient les explorateurs de cette mer, il s’y rencontrera toujours un lieu vierge, un antre inconnu, des fleurs, des perles, des monstres, quelque chose d’inouï, oublié par les plongeurs littéraires.” Immediately after proclaiming that Paris will always hold secrets to literary divers, of course, Balzac notes that his creation, the Maison Vauquer, “est une de ces monstruosité curieuses” (54).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 312–313.

In *Bubu*, the privileged topographical figure for Pierre's Paris is not the ocean but the river, an image first engaged to characterize Pierre's affective response to the crowds that swarm the Sébastopol in the novel's opening pages. With its moderate depths effaced by the horizontal velocity of its current, the Philippean river is a Seine rendered as an unrelenting and unidirectional flow, one which Pierre has no hopes of learning to navigate: "Pierre Hardy ne fut plus rien. Paris débordé le roulait, le prenait entre ses grandes eaux et l'entraînait, Pierre Hardy, fils d'un marchand de bois, ami de Louis Buisson, candidat à l'examen de conducteur des Ponts et Chaussées, l'entraînait entre ses deux rives perdues, et l'entraînait jusqu'au bout du monde" (62-63). Trapped in the waters that rush between the river's inaccessible banks – and the cadenced repetition of the verbs that describe its flow ("roulait," "prenait," "entraînait") – Pierre is dragged forward along the river's ruthlessly flat trajectory, unable to accede to the vertical plane of metaphor that would allow him to distill the city's impressions into a containable and intelligible sign. This directed horizontality, which echoes that of the Haussmannian boulevard itself, recurs elsewhere in the flat similitudes of the narrator's aphoristic language: "Il les voyait par masses, [...] *brillants* comme quelques regards de femmes qu'il avait vu *briller*;" "Pour avoir la paix il [...] se *déversait* dans une fille sale comme un *déversoir* public;" "Paris les avait pris dans *sa main qui broie* et [...] les avait *broyés*" (55, 61, 64; my emphasis).³⁰ In *Bubu*'s Paris, even comparisons go nowhere, as the potential for metaphorical mobilization is constricted by an impoverished repertoire of word-image relations that reflects Pierre's restricted mobility within a Paris that is "dur aux pauvres." The symbolization of Paris as its central river vehiculates what Barthes terms a "métonymie effrénée," as Pierre's quest to stay afloat in the city

³⁰ I should note that here (and throughout this chapter) my usage of *lieu commun* is not limited to the strict rhetorical definition of the *locus communis*; I mean the term to capture the range of narrative locutions (textual sites or *lieux*) that can be characterized as *commun*, as (alternately) sites of community, commonality, or commonness. The text's playful deployment of this (literal) breed of commonplace – of a word that recurs while going nowhere – is evident throughout. To cite a particularly self-ironizing example: "Marthe était blanchisseuse et travaillait dans l'atelier où Blanche faisait son apprentissage. Comme elle le disait, on avait voulu que Blanche pût blanchir les autres" (72). "Quand on sort de l'hôpital à peu près guérie, l'on appelle cela être blanchie. Elle était blanchie!" (183).

takes the form of a search for metaphor: for the body mappable as a sign and landmark, one capable of lifting him up out of the unremitting flow of “mass commodities” (to recall Clark’s expression) circulating through Paris’s streets.³¹

Bereft of any alternative distinctions that might offset the downward thrust of his poverty, Pierre looks not to ascend the urban ranks, but merely to avoid drowning in the identitary mire of the city’s streets: to stave off the erosive waves of noisy bodies and vehicles that churn indifferently around him as he walks the Sébastopol, in a “confusion de Babel qui effare et fait danser trop d’idées à la fois” (53).³² As the narrator describes his plight:

Il essayait de se raccrocher à quelque chose pour n’être pas submergé. Il avait besoin de descendre en lui-même et d’y trouver, en face de ce qui passait, quelque joie pour n’être pas perdu au milieu de l’universelle gaieté. Il voulait opposer une digue au flux montant et crier: « J’existe aussi. Avec des pierres et du ciment je me dresse et je vous arrête alors que vous hurlez. » (56-57)³³

Ironically, Pierre’s self-edifying affirmation that he exists – a symbolic iteration of Simmelian reserve – is an absence, a narratorial rehearsal of an unspoken desire to speak that underscores the futility of his projected words.³⁴ The realization of the aspiring surveyor’s theoretical capacity to design and assess the urbanistic structures that would buttress his presence in Paris – to craft the bridges (*ponts*) that would stand him on solid ground at a remove from the city’s diversionary flows, to chart the paths (*chaussées*) that might lead him away from the disorienting clamor of the urban center – is here

³¹ Roland Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1976), 204.

³² Jacques Derrida has argued that “Babel” figures “un inachèvement, l’impossibilité de compléter, de totaliser, de saturer, d’achever quelque chose qui est de l’ordre de l’édification, de la construction architecturale, du système et de l’architectonique” – in other words, of the order of place, a proper place that would be signified by the “nom propre” (and one which resonates with Pierre’s desire to construct a protective *digue* with *pierres* and *ciment*) (209).

³³ As Peter Stallybrass and Allon White write, “There is no more easily recognizable scene of bourgeois pathos than the lonely crowd in which individual identity is achieved *over against* all the others, through the sad realization of not-belonging. That moment, in which the subject is made the outsider to the crowd, an onlooker, compensating for exclusion through the deployment of the discriminating gaze, is at the very root of bourgeois sensibility.” Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1986), 187.

³⁴ Simmel’s essay “The Metropolis and Mental Life” was published only two years after *Bubu de Montparnasse*.

contingent on a mastery of the city's (building) codes, a concretization and banalization of the semantic test that Paris famously poses to Balzac's Rastignac and Lucien (incidentally, Pierre will never sit for the *Ponts et chaussées* exam in diegetic time). Unable to distill the boulevard's multifarious sights and sounds into an intelligible metaphor (itself a bridge or path) that would anchor and orient his presence in Paris, and further incapable of consolidating the myriad minor ideas sparked by those urban impressions into a cohesive and implementable ideation, Pierre is a poor reader of the city's sensory landscape – an interpretative deficiency that precludes access to the brasserie's breed of writerly mastery (itself, we have seen, modeled on Balzac's).

“Pauvre, laid, [et] timide,” Pierre is unable to project the narrative structure that would direct him to his only stated goal: “l'Amour,” the sentimental supplement that would wordlessly affirm that he, too, exists.³⁵ As is so often the case in fin-de-siècle fiction, Pierre initially seeks to assuage his urban disaffection through the communion with a prostitute: here, Berthe Méténier, whom he meets while listening to a group of street singers on the corner of the Sébastopol and the rue Greneta in the novel's opening chapter (65).³⁶ While previous boulevard strolls in search of affection, we learn, have yielded only ephemeral and utilitarian liaisons with whores (“déversoirs”) who fail to instantiate the “images de femmes” he seeks in the name of Love, Pierre's encounter with Berthe is transmuted into an enduring pursuit by his initial misreading of Berthe, a clandestine street whore, as a “petite femme [avec] des bandeaux noirs et un air gentil” (65).³⁷ Seduced by her modish hairstyle and her

³⁵ I take the adjectives from Bubu's opening scene, where they are used to characterize the Sébastopol's nighttime pleasure-seekers (including Pierre). In an 1897 letter to Francis Jammes, Philippe characterizes himself using the same triad of adjectives: “Je suis employé à la ville de Paris, *pauvre, laid, timide*, solitaire, irascible et bon.” Quoted in Vercier, *La mauvaise fortune: Charles-Louis Philippe*, 24. My emphasis.

³⁶ On the Sébastopol, Pierre is out of place both temporally (with respect to a life devoted to work and study) and spatially (with respect to a prevailing urban and literary disposition whereby provincial *bacheliers* customarily made their Parisian home on the Left Bank).

³⁷ Indeed Pierre, surprised to meet a young woman who would engage him in conversation and “n'avait pas l'air effarouchée,” naïvely “avait grand'peur qu'elle ne l'acceptât pas” when he invites Berthe (the prostitute who has just discreetly solicited him) out for a bock (65).

uncommon kindness, Pierre believes Berthe to be a suitable remedy to his solitude, a female companion through whose substantiating presence he might finally become a subject. And briefly, the “[p]etite prostituée douce et debutante” does succeed in anchoring Pierre in Paris: during their second encounter, Pierre and Berthe stroll leisurely by the Seine, the river bounded and tamed by their provisional union; with a willing (and compensated) interlocutor, Pierre is able to spin false stories of how it “[lui] rappelle [sa] petite ville” (“[c]e n’était pas vrai, mais il était auprès d’une femme et voulait lui faire connaître des choses sur ses goûts et sur sa vie”) (89, 86). In the prostitute’s presence, Pierre reconfigures Paris in narrative, rendering the unhomely city *heimlich* by discursively grafting his provincial home onto its riverbanks.

Soon after its onset, however, Pierre’s provisional coexistence with Berthe is menaced by the authority of her lover and “gouvernement,” Bubu, the pimp who keeps track of her time and her earnings. The novel’s early chapters oscillate between the two men who occupy Berthe’s time, as she spends her days with Bubu and her nights with Pierre, who willingly pays five francs for the pleasure of her company as “nous vivons dans un monde où les plaisirs se paient” (82). When Berthe contracts syphilis, however, and transmits it to both Pierre and Bubu, the disease precludes the situating illusions of home Pierre stakes on Berthe’s presence, abrading the discrete temporalities of the two men and joining them in a common narrative thread articulated around her body. The syphilitic mark that reinforces Bubu’s presence – “s’il n’avait pas la vérole,” the pimp muses, “il était grand temps de l’avoir” – cements Pierre’s subjective absence, definitively estranging him from both his past and his provincial home and confining him to a present of Parisian misery: “Aujourd’hui, ce mal que tu m’as fait, c’est lui qui doit nous unir. Tu es pour moi la seule femme possible, puisque mon toucher donne la peste” (110, 155).³⁸ Caught in the double bind of a communion that

³⁸ Bubu’s embrace of his syphilitic status echoes Guy de Maupassant’s proclamation in an 1877 letter to Robert Pinchon: “J’ai la vérole, enfin, la vraie, pas la misérable chaude-pisse, pas l’ecclésiastique cristalline, pas les bourgeoises crêtes de coq, les légumineux choux-fleurs, non, non, la grande vérole, celle dont est mort François I^{er}. Et j’en suis fier, malheur, et

substantiates his future self only by effecting a permanent fissure with his past, Pierre is obliged to contend with Bubu on the latter's terms and turf.

In choosing a pimp as his antagonist, Philippe materializes fin-de-siècle anxieties about the mounting presence and influence of these “maîtres du pavé” (and the clandestine whores they commanded) on Paris's streets.³⁹ The pimp at once contravenes and literalizes the conceptual mapping of prostitution we have traced in previous chapters, making a career of plotting the prostitute in a profitable time and location. A “parasite” who feeds on the abolitionist press's attacks on reglementarist policy, according to both Commenge and Macé, the *souteneur* is figured in Philippe's novelistic Paris as an underworld arriviste, a fin-de-siècle hybrid of Vautrin and Rastignac who possesses the grand ideas that Pierre lacks: “des idées bourgeoises,” a “sentiment de la propriété” that motivates his peculiar breed of urban ambition (80).⁴⁰ By appropriating Berthe and subjugating her to his whims and his order – that is to say, by authoring her prostitutional narrative – Maurice Bélu becomes Bubu de Montparnasse, projecting himself up out of urban indifference by acquiring through Berthe's labor the time to master Paris's streets and codes. The expressions that recur in descriptions of Bubu reinforce the power of this bourgeois sense of property to endow him with the capacity to forge and shape his own path: he is a craftsman [“Je suis Maurice qu'on appelle aussi Bubu-de-Montparnasse. Maurice est un homme qui prend les femmes dans sa main et les *façonne*. Il prend Berthe la fleuriste, il la choisit belle et vierge, puis il en fait son plaisir, puis il en fait son métier” (106); “Les coups de poing des souteneurs *façonnent* les filles et laissent leur marque dans la chair blanche auprès des désirs qu'y mit Dieu” (149-150)] and an authorial man of action [“il était

je méprise par-dessus tout les bourgeois. Alléluia, j'ai la vérole, par conséquent, je n'ai plus peur de l'attraper.” Guy de Maupassant, *Correspondance*, ed. Jacques Suffel, vol. 1 (Évreux: Le Cercle du Bibliophile, 1973), 62.

³⁹ Commenge, *Hygiène sociale: La prostitution clandestine à Paris*, 93. Macé similarly refers to the fact that “Depuis quelques années, les souteneurs ont augmenté, à Paris, dans des proportions inquiétantes pour la sécurité publique.” Gustave Macé, *La Police parisienne: Le service de la Sureté* (Paris: G. Charpentier, 1885), 159.

⁴⁰ Commenge, *Hygiène sociale: La prostitution clandestine à Paris*, 100. Macé, *La Police parisienne: Le service de la Sureté*, 159.

un *homme d'action* et n'aimait pas les contradicteurs" (71); "Maurice, qui *était un homme d'action*, croyait à la nécessité des châtements corporels. Il la gifla, persuadé qu'une gifle fortifierait en elle le sentiment de la vérité" (78)]. With "convictions [...] fortes," "des paroles solides," and an ability to "manier les femmes," Maurice charts the narrative path whose construction remains unrealizable for Pierre, whose rental of Berthe from her owner accords no mastery (70-71). The author of his days and of his destiny, Maurice is likewise the generative force of *Bubu's* primary narrative map, a plot he crafts through the violent inscription of his words (given material heft by the adjective "solides") onto the prostitute's body. With this distinctly non-reglementarist inscription of the *fille du trottoir*, Bubu reverses the official paradigm, acquiring through Berthe's venal labor the time necessary to master and manipulate not only Paris's women, but through them, its streets and semantic codes.⁴¹ Afforded the flâneur's breed of urban leisure, Bubu "marche sans un souci dans les rues des villes pendant que les uns souffrent et pendant que les autres peinent; il peut conquérir ce qui l'entoure ; il marche et semble un homme marchant dans sa maison" (107).

In his pursuit of Berthe, then, Pierre is an interloper, as he treads on a time and narrative that Bubu asserts as proprietary – an ascending temporality of mastery that, we have seen, is out of joint with respect to Pierre's flat narrative disposition. This dissonance is further articulated through the novel's hyperbolic insistence on the date of Pierre's and Berthe's first meeting, "le lendemain du Quatorze Juillet." Though three years pass between Berthe's initial encounter with Bubu at a neighborhood dance on the fourteenth of July and her encounter with Pierre on the Sébastopol on the fifteenth of the same month, the temporal duration is elided under the sequential juxtaposition of the calendar days. On the fourteenth of July, the narrator reports, Maurice is able to choose

⁴¹ As Richard Terdiman has argued, this desire for mastery is the defining characteristic of the novel of formation: "The initiation paradigm which Balzac elaborates represents the ambition to penetrate the dominant sign system, to inhabit it as known territory and manipulate it freely from a secure position at its heart." Richard Terdiman, *Discourse/Counter-Discourse: The Theory and Practice of Symbolic Resistance in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 106.

Berthe at his leisure as “[l]e peuple, à cause de l’anniversaire de sa délivrance, laisse ses filles danser en liberté”; “le lendemain,” when Pierre crosses her path, Berthe’s mobility is once again restricted, confined to the minor liberties of clandestine practice as the *filles du peuple* return to their place (71). Already appropriated by an enterprising Bubu, Berthe is only available to Pierre as a rental, a common place – a temporary dwelling as im-proper as the room he inhabits on the rue de l’Arbre-Sec, one already tenanted by “trop de locataires” (56). A day late (and several dollars short⁴²) for the *arriviste*’s breed of virile conquest, Pierre is joined to Berthe in a flat exchange of his money for her company that reflects the common constraints on their individual freedoms. “[N]i assez riche ni assez beau pour choisir ma femme parmi celles que je connais,” as Pierre will avow to Berthe much later in the novel, he hinges his virile subjectivation on her not by choice, but rather by spatial and circumstantial “hasard” – a chance encounter made enduring by the syphilitic contagion that prevents Pierre from escaping the city and Bubu’s purview (154).

And so, Pierre seeks to combat Bubu and erect a barrier against the mounting flux of Paris’s atomizing pleasures with “des [P]ierres”: by bolstering his impoverished urban presence with an auxiliary avatar. Unable to actualize his theoretical competence as a designer of either urban infrastructure or his own narrative, Pierre turns for guidance to Louis Buisson, his lone friend in Paris and “seul refuge.” Louis is a small man of modest means whose signature trait is an immoderate enthusiasm for blustering diatribes, a few years older than Pierre and better off by a “petite différence d’éducation.”⁴³ Fortified by a dogged attachment to philosophical principles governing everything from his worldview to his coffee preparation, Louis is able to withstand the

⁴² The novel tells us that Bubu had 5000 francs at his disposal in the early days of his relationship with Berthe; it is when the money runs out that he urges Berthe to become a prostitute.

⁴³ “Louis Buisson était un peu dogmatique et causait longuement,” the narrator observes; “On lui disait au bureau : « Oh ! vous, vous voulez toujours avoir raison. Vous faites des discours »” (114). Louis is aware of the habit; as he launches into a story that will predict *Bubu*’s plot in microcosm (a story we will soon revisit), the narrator remarks that “Il souriait en pensant: Je vais faire un discours” (115).

city's stimulatory onslaught and hold his course on their ideational grounds. Pierre, conversely, “ne pouva[n]t rien opposer à l'éclat des lumières et aux débordements du plaisir,” is distracted and diverted by the desires that “souvent [...] l'avaient mené”; unfocused by the analytic principles his friend acquires in his leisurely readings of fiction and philosophy, Pierre's desires are deracinating, leading him to the brink of nowhere with a verb (*mener*) with no object, bereft of a predicative destination (59). It is Louis who makes sense – both meaning and direction – of Pierre's misery, as “ils viv[e]nt d'une vie commune dont Louis Buisson [est] l'interprète” (114-115).

By posing Louis as Pierre's authorial guide, Philippe would seem to offer the diffident bachelor a prescriptive path to mastery, a narrative capable of disengaging the pimp's hold on Berthe. Upon hearing of Pierre's fortuitous liaison with the prostitute, Louis spins a cautionary tale from his own experience, a didactic speech designed to “mettre sa conduite [à Pierre] d'accord avec ses idées [à Louis].” As an interpreter of their common life, Louis translates the details of his lived history into an orderly narrative, one whose causal plotline should be readily incorporable for a Pierre whose character is said to “se compose[r] des paroles de [son] am[i] autant que des mouvements de [son] cœur” (120). Louis, it seems, was once involved with a *débutante*, a girl from a decent family diverted from the path of honest living by a man whose “regard la dominait comme une force puissante” and who “était là, derrière elle, avec ses deux poings et avec ses mâchoires” (116). As Berthe will do with Pierre, the girl occasionally visits Louis in search of companionship and “deux sous”; it is another man, however, who risks his life to save her from her pimp. This, Louis warns Pierre, is a testament to his own volitional deficiency:

Il n'y a pas longtemps que je connais ces choses, mais chaque jour je les comprends davantage. Il y eut un jeune homme de tant d'amour qu'il entra dans le cœur d'une pauvre fille. Et moi aussi, j'aurais dû entrer dans ce cœur. Quand vint le jeune homme, il était bien trop tard, mais moi il eût été temps. Il y a trois ans déjà. Elle n'était pas mariée et j'aurais pu la sortir des bras d'un souteneur. J'aurais dû la prendre et la mettre chez moi et combattre. J'aurais dû la sauver. Comprends-tu cela: *J'aurais pu la sauver!* Ah! pourquoi ne l'ai-je pas assez aimée? (118)

In avowing his shortcomings, Louis furnishes the raw materials for Pierre's heroism: love the prostitute enough and you will become a man by saving her from her pimp. Louis's narrative rehearsal of his past failures ("l'échec de ses beaux rêves d'avenir") would seem to chart a course for a different ending for Pierre, one that would redeem Louis's past and Pierre's present by rewriting it as their common future.

Proper Places and Obedient Fictions

Berthe is thus the object and vehicle of two counterposed narrative trajectories: Pierre's redemptive edification that would make her an honest woman and him a man, and Bubu's continued subjugation that makes her a common whore and him her nominal *souteneur* (and de facto *soutenu*). These two potential paths to urban mastery, made manifest as two modes of mapping the prostitute's narrative – the didactic speeches that Pierre borrows from Louis, and Bubu's violent "art" of corporeal inscription – merge in a final chapter that re-stages Louis's predictive tale of the pimp's volitional triumph without reorienting the dénouement, with Pierre standing idly by as Bubu comes to retrieve his human property (a "bien qu'il met en location") from Pierre's bed. It is Pierre who utters the novel's final words, which cement his failure to redeem both Berthe and Louis:

- Ah! je sais que tu vas pleurer: Mon Dieu, mon Dieu! je n'ai pas de chance. Tu n'as pas assez de courage pour mériter le bonheur. Pleure et crève! Si tu étais seul, tu aurais dû descendre en chemise et pieds nus pour crier: Au secours! Tu aurais dû aller dans la rue et raccrocher les passants et leur dire: Accourez tous! Il y a là-bas une femme qu'on assassine. (192)

This overdetermined ending seemingly leaves little room for dissenting readings. Indeed Louis, Pierre's "interpreter," also preemptively serves as the reader's, modeling the proper means of making sense of Pierre's narrative. The language common to the two passages – the self-censuring of the past conditional, the decrivals of cowardice – seals Pierre's virile deficiency, and his relegation to the ground-level urban flows that preclude him from finding his place in Paris. Unable to sustainably

map Berthe's location or her narrative – to “la mettre chez [lui] et combattre,” as Louis would have it, and thereby to refashion Louis's failure into a redemption of the prostitute as a localizing metaphor – Pierre is unable to map himself as a subject. In what follows, however, I want to suggest that reading this capitulation as a failure participates in a logic of binary opposition that the novel constantly adduces but works to disperse.⁴⁴ The plotting of Pierre and Louis – the additive protagonism which bespeaks Pierre's subjective impotence, his fungibility as a leading man – against Bubus belies a subjacent logic of identification between Louis and the pimp, one that unites the countervailing currents of their narrative trajectories on a common narrative map.

The narrative Louis and Pierre share is founded on the former's conception of their common suffering, in a world “où les pauvres doivent souffrir.” It is this identification that grants Louis authority, that makes of him Pierre's “only refuge” in a city where he has no other affective ties. As repeatedly evinced in the narrator's accounts of his interior monologue, however, Louis Buisson's desired identification with the people remains vexed by the interposed preposition *comme*: “Il pensait: Je gagne cent quatre-vingts francs par mois. Je suis *comme* un homme du peuple et je travaille ” (57, my emphasis). Or again: “Je veux vivre *comme* un homme du peuple, avec une femme du peuple. D'ailleurs je hais les riches qui nous volent nos plaisirs” (58, my emphasis). The difference couched under the simile's surface unification of Louis and the *homme du peuple*, which recurs in the “petite différence d'éducation” and of urban location that distinguishes him from Pierre, is made manifest in Louis's own disposition: his configuration and allocation of the space and time at his disposal. Unlike Pierre, Louis is “dans ses meubles”; at night, when Pierre's time is ostensibly devoted to occupational study, Louis “s'occup[e] de littérature et de philosophie après s'être promené dans la rue en regardant les jeunes femmes” (58, 57). In the end, as Louis ruefully

⁴⁴ My thinking here, and my argument in the remainder of this chapter, is indebted to Janet Beizer's analysis of irony in Rachilde's *Monsieur Vénus*. In *Ventriloquized Bodies: Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 227–260.

concludes, “Je ne dois pas être du même peuple que les autres” (114). Louis’s self-distinction is a tacit recognition of the situational gap between the inseparable friends, a classification that bespeaks an alternate configuration of narrative sympathies.

Indeed, if it is Pierre who “s’alli[e] dès le premier jour” with Louis Buisson in an effort to resist Paris’s stimuli with the affective shield of his supplementary presence, it is Bubu who shares Louis’s perspective, as one who is likewise fond of orderly principles and rigid classification (56).

The narrator diagnoses the latter as Bubu’s defining trait:

Voici: Maurice qui, avait le caractère résolu, classait trop nettement les connaissances humaines. Comme l’empereur Charlemagne, il avait mis d’un côté les idées qui ne lui plaisaient pas et de l’autre celles qui lui plaisaient. Il pensait : « Là-bas, c’est l’erreur, mais ici, c’est la vérité. » Comme l’empereur Charlemagne, il n’avait pas le sentiment des nuances. (78)

Bubu’s dichotomous thinking aligns him with the taxonomic logic of reglementarist policy, which looks to control prostitution by affixing names to bodies to locations – an analogy we saw earlier in Bubu’s implicit inscription of Berthe through the corporeal transcription of his “solid words” onto her flesh. Though less violently, Louis likewise perpetuates a philosophy of didactic inscription: “Les femmes du peuple sont simples et toutes les femmes sont malléables,” he surmises to Pierre. “Je lui prêtais quelques livres pour la façonner à mon gré” (113). Posing the prostitute’s disorder as a problem to be remedied by ensuring a causal correspondence between textual input and behavioral output, Louis prescribes a strategic diet of salutary fictions meant to reorient the comportment of “des jeunes filles ayant de mauvaises dispositions”; if he feeds his “petite bonne” a well-balanced ration of salutary texts, Louis reasons, “Elle saura comprendre les choses délicates qui sont l’ordre et le bonheur d’une maison” (117, 113). With this model of discursive edification – applied unilaterally, even when he himself wants to “mettre sa conduite d’accord avec ses idées” – Louis attempts to keep his *fille du peuple* from straying from the narrative path he crafts for her by becoming a wanton, indiscriminately circulating text.

This mode of behavioral mapping is parallel to the strategy that Louis would inculcate in Pierre, whose future he likewise attempts to shape with the directed logic of his admonitory narrative. The resounding echoes of Louis's speeches in the novel's final scene invite the reader to interpret Pierre's inaction as a failure of mimetic reading, likening Hardy to the young woman who proves stubbornly unsusceptible to Louis's formational fictions. As a reparative rehearsal of Philippe's own failed subjectivation – his abortive longing to “devenir un homme” rather than persist as an *homme de lettres*⁴⁵ – *Bubu* is a testament to the powerlessness of the poor, the ugly, and the timid to make themselves seen and heard in “un monde où les pauvres doivent souffrir,” to make it known that they “existe[nt] aussi.” For Pierre to heed Louis's lesson, however, he would have to cede to the authority of Bubu's paradigm, to participate implicitly in his own subjugation by accepting the primacy of an urban map where he lacks a place. The strategy Pierre mobilizes in his quest to redeem Berthe paradoxically participates in their common subjugation, making his manifest failure at the novel's close equivocal. I want now to propose another reading, one in which Pierre's submission to Bubu – and the prostitutional circulation that submission facilitates – inscribes a subversion of the pimp's mastery, and more generally of the paradigm of urban mastery in the fin-de-siècle novel.

Commonplaces and Venal Disobedience

To read Pierre's capitulation to Bubu as simply a mark of abortive mastery – a predictably failed redemption (*rachat*), attributable to Pierre's economic and virile poverty – is to disregard

⁴⁵ “Il y a une chose terrible pour moi: savoir si cette histoire se terminera par de la vie et si enfin je deviendrai l'homme que je voudrais être, — ou si comme toujours j'en sortirai avec un livre. N'être qu'un homme de lettres, j'en ai soupé, et de faire des chopins de documents! Ecrirai-je cette aventure ou ne l'écrirai-je pas? J'aurais l'impression de m'arracher la chair par poignées et je suis triste de tout mon passé comme plein de terreur devant la destinée. Je ne sais pas ce que je vais devenir. [...] Mon pauvre vieux cœur, je suis bien malade. Tu ne peux pas savoir comme j'entends résonner ces mots: *n'être qu'un homme de lettres*.” Philippe, *Lettres de Jeunesse à Henri Vandeputte*, 136–138. (February 12, 1901).

another mode of reading that the novel figures from its opening scene.⁴⁶ Under the dominant paradigm articulated by Louis's noisy speeches and Bubu's blustering words, that is, Philippe inscribes an alternative mapping of Pierre's narrative trajectory, in a duality corresponding to what Rancière distinguishes in *Aisthesis* as "deux manières de sortir de la sujétion plébéienne: par le renversement des positions ou par la suspension du jeu même de ces positions."⁴⁷ Pierre's failure to displace the pimp at the novel's end makes manifest these two narrative mappings of prostitution – and, through the sympathy of Pierre and the *pierreuse*, of the impoverished urban subject – which we might denote as "proper" and "common," respectively.⁴⁸ The former, we have seen, is the paradigm of the prostitutional appropriation and the proper noun (Pierre and his avatars), whereby Louis Buisson compensates for Pierre's subjective indeterminacy with the prescriptive force of his narrative that would allow him to become a virile subject by wresting the prostitute from her pimp and putting her in her (that is to say, his) place. Both Louis's project of prostitutional salvation and Bubu's instrumentalization of Berthe's body, I have argued, are aligned with this dominant order. In the latter, "common" mode, as we shall see in what follows, the prostitute potentially activates the novel's semantic and symbolic flatness with her discursive mobility, clandestinely "poaching" on the surface of Paris's streets and Philippe's text. Replete with commonplaces and common nouns (*pierres*, the *pierreuse*), the surface of *Bubu* describes a world actuated by taxonomic absolutes – one where Pierre, channeling one of Louis's many speeches, declares that "nous souffrons parce que

⁴⁶ The importance of Pierre's lack of capital is underscored by his payment of a meager sum to Bubu in exchange for the time he has spent with Berthe, which Bubu deridingly terms "une nuit d'amour." He cannot "buy back" (*racheter*) Berthe within the context of Bubu's Paris, only rent her.

⁴⁷ Jacques Rancière, *Aisthesis: Scènes du régime esthétique de l'art* (Paris: Galilée, 2011), 67. Rancière refers here to Julien Sorel in Stendhal's *Le Rouge et le noir*.

⁴⁸ In distinguishing these two modes dichotomously, of course, I risk aligning my argumentative logic with Bubu's taxonomic order and lack of "nuances." My point is not, however, to suggest that the proper and the common are somehow opposing systems of logic, but rather to propose that *Bubu* finds grounds in the "common," in the impoverished and the indistinct, for a disruption of the dominant order. *Bubu* does not directly refer to Berthe as a "pierreuse," though the description of the macadam-paved Haussmannian boulevard Berthe walks as "dur comme des pierres" is evocative.

nous sommes pauvres et timides” – but undermines their univocality by facilitating a mode of intervention proper to those without a place of their own (58).⁴⁹

Berthe Méténier is a discerning and discriminating (con)textual reader.⁵⁰ The novel’s account of her encounter with Pierre underscores her readerly guile by literalizing the literary nature of her “instrument de travail”; having successfully “read” Pierre as a profitable mark, Berthe engages him in the venal transaction through her corrective reading of lyrics inaccurately transposed in a purchased booklet that Pierre, left to his own devices, “li[t] sans beaucoup d’attention” (64). Eschewing the street whore’s stereotypical “Monsieur, écoutez donc?” in favor of a more substantive declaration that “[c]e n’est pas la vraie chanson,” Berthe’s initial diversion of Pierre’s banal path is an overtly aesthetic intervention (65). Initially, Pierre is himself indifferent to Berthe’s readerly distinction (indeed, the narrator drily remarks of Berthe’s critical interpretation of the lyrics, “[c]ela lui était parfaitement égal”), as his failure to make himself recognized is displaced onto his own meager capacity for discernment. That Berthe’s incursion into Pierre’s life is a fortuitous but fateful transaction occasioned by a haphazardly circulating text suggests that we consider her as a reader, and consider the implications of her practice *for* the reader.

While Philippe’s novel eschews the taxonomic vocabulary of officially tolerated prostitution (a noteworthy elision in a novel replete with classificatory axioms), the distinction between *filles soumises* and *filles insoumises* is nonetheless suggested in the opening scene on the Sébastopol, where the narrator classifies the prostitutes near les Halles according to their dress and their characteristic

⁴⁹ Much later in the novel, Pierre reiterates the sentiment in direct discourse when talking to Berthe, further suggesting the imbrication of his voice with Louis’s: “Nous vivons dans un monde où les pauvres doivent souffrir [...] [U]n ami m’a dit les paroles que je te répète, j’ai su que le monde était mauvais et que tous deux nous étions à plaindre” (154-155). Given the many derivatives of the prefix *sous-* in the novel, it is perhaps worth noting that *souffrir* is derived from the Latin *sub-* (under) and *fero* (to carry or bear) and resonates semantically and etymologically with *soutenir*.

⁵⁰ It is worth noting here that Berthe’s surname, Méténier, aligns her with Oscar Méténier (1859-1913), a popular author of several dramatic and novelistic works concerned with prostitution [such as *Madame la Boule* (1890) and the theatrical adaptation of Guy de Maupassant’s *Mademoiselle Fifi* (1896)].

techniques of seduction: “Voici les filles publiques en cheveux et les filles publiques en chapeau. Les unes ont une démarche lourde de vache et accostent les hommes avec impudence. D’autres se tortillent, raccrochent du coin de l’œil et préparent leur sourire” (51).⁵¹ That registered prostitutes were not permitted to ply their trade without a hat supports a reading of Philippe’s hatted whores as *filles soumises* and his bareheaded prostitutes as *filles insoumises*; that the “tolerated” status of the former allowed them to recruit clients more brazenly (“avec impudence”) than their clandestine counterparts, furthermore, suggests that we read the impudent accosters as registered whores and those who seduce with a coquettish wink and a whisper of a smile as unregistered.⁵² As police prefect C.J. Lecour observes (in terms that anticipate Philippe’s), “[b]eaucoup de ces filles [insoumises] ne racolent pas ouvertement à la façon des prostituées en carte. Elles jouent de la prunelle ou du coude, ricanent, appellent l’attention par leur démarche, leur costume, se font accoster, mais n’accostent point, cherchent l’occasion et acceptent tous les hasards.”⁵³ Both Philippe and Lecour locate the primary perceptible difference between registered and unregistered whores in the modality of their engagement with passersby, contrasting the strident oral recruitment (*racolage*) of the *soumise* with the furtive gestural seduction (*raccrochage*) of the *insoumise*.⁵⁴

⁵¹ When announcing his plans to write the novel that would become *Bubu* to his friend Vandeputte, Philippe details the preparatory work he will undertake: “Je commence à amasser des documents. [...] Il faut encore que je m’occupe de la prostitution à Paris. J’irai dans les cafés de femmes, dans les bordels. Il faut que je fasse la connaissance d’un certain nombre de vieilles putains immondes, que je sache leur vie du jour et surtout celle de la nuit. Il faut que je visite le Dépôt, Saint-Lazare, les hôpitaux. Si c’est possible, j’assisterai à la visite hebdomadaire des femmes en carte. Travail, travail !” The sketch attests Philippe’s awareness of the reglementarist system, though he would later abandon much of his documentary research in favor of learning the substance of his text from Maria herself, his “encyclopédie ambulante.” Philippe, *Lettres de Jeunesse à Henri Vandeputte*, 106. (December 4, 1898).

⁵² For a concise summary of the requirements of the *mise en carte*, see Jean-Marc Berlière, *La police des mœurs sous la IIIe République* (Paris: Seuil, 1992), 22–23 *et passim*. Berlière includes a reproduction of a *carte de fille inscrite* from 1885, which specifies that “[l]a coiffure en cheveux leur est interdite” and that “[i]l leur est défendu de stationner sur la voie publique, d’y former des groupes, d’y circuler en réunion” (216–217).

⁵³ Lecour, *La Prostitution à Paris et à Londres, 1789–1871*, 145.

⁵⁴ Street prostitutes were the only category of *filles* who actively sought out clients in this way, a move necessitated by the circulatory and multifunctional nature of their space of practice. The verbs *racoler* and *raccrocher* are functionally synonymous, both referring to the techniques by which the street prostitute attracts and recruits her clients. The subtle etymological divergence between the two words, however – *racoler* (from *accoler*) implies the throwing of one’s arms

Philippe's syntax further accentuates the equivocal positioning of *filles soumises* with respect to reglementarist law, which not only assigned bodies to names and places but also delineated how and where they were to be seen and heard. The narrator's second dichotomy, which opposes "Les unes" to "D'autres" across an axis that would seem to align neatly with the initial demarcation between the *filles en chapeau* and the *filles en cheveux*, is doubly suggestive. First, the order of the comparison is chiasmatic, reversed from one classification to the next: "Les unes" refers to the registered prostitutes *en chapeau*, while "D'autres" identifies the clandestine prostitutes *en cheveux*. More tellingly, perhaps, the terms of the dichotomy are not parallel. Philippe opposes "les unes" not to "les autres," but rather to "d'autres," an indefinite determiner that suggests some number of clandestine prostitutes who may remain uncounted and unaccounted for – a tacit, oblique disordering of a reglementarist system that asserts discursive and spatial control over the prostitute's body through its allocational taxonomy.⁵⁵

In keeping with a more general practice of taxonomic bifurcation that runs through the novel, the narrator sets Berthe and Blanche, the two superficially analogous sisters, in similarly dichotomous relief: "Blanche avait le métier plus facile et procédait par interpellations directes. Berthe, un peu tortillée, montrait des coups d'œil"; "Elles allaient : Blanche, nu-tête, à grands pas solides comme les blanchisseuses à paniers, Berthe à petits pas, ayant des mines comme les ouvrières

around another's neck (*cou*), whereas *raccrocher* (from *accrocher*) evokes a hook (*croc*) that ensnares passersby without direct corporeal contact – further reinforces the distinction between the two groups of prostitutes: the paradoxically assertive *filles soumises*, and the apparently passive *filles insoumises*. Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales, "Portail lexical," accessed September 22, 2012, <http://www.cnrtl.fr/etymologie/>.

⁵⁵ As Octave Uzanne writes, registered prostitutes (unlike *filles insoumises*) did have an allocated milieu on the street: "Tant qu'elle n'est pas mise en carte, elle vagabonde de droite et de gauche, suit son p'tit homme de garni en garni, lorsque, pour échapper aux recherches de la police avec laquelle il a souvent maille à partir, celui-ci se croit obligé de changer fréquemment de résidence. Une fois *en carte*, il lui est assigné un certain espace sur tel trottoir d'une rue, ou, selon, telle longueur de boulevard ; c'est là qu'elle *bat son quart* ou fait son *truc* ; elle va et vient, accrochant les passants par le bras et leur chuchotant des phrases [...] Si elle sort des limites qui lui sont fixées par la police, elle est passible d'une amende ; elle le tente quelquefois lorsque les agents ne sont pas là, et alors ce sont de terribles querelles avec ses camarades en possession d'une autre partie de la rue [...]" Uzanne, *Parisiennes de ce temps*, 362–363. The uncountable and unlocalizable nature of the *corps des insoumises* was the nexus of the fears it provoked among those concerned with maintaining the cartographic order of the *mise en carte*; unincorporated, the clandestine *trotteuse* often eluded official regulation, as it was thought to be impossible to ensure that an *bonne femme* would not be mistaken for a *fille insoumise*.

fleuristes” (143-144).⁵⁶ Whereas Blanche’s audacity and profligate pursuit of clients liken her to the *fille soumise*, her ostensible improprieties marking her compliance with what Philippe shows to be the reglementarist order, Berthe is aligned with the clandestine prostitutes like “la petite Jeanne” and “la petite Gabrielle” who must poach their venal opportunities while remaining demonstrably compliant with the disciplinary grid. In a literalization of the brasserie whore’s de-centering of the Balzacian paradigm and reappropriation of the arriviste’s authorial role, it is Blanche – and not the ostensible leading man, Pierre – who is likened to “un homme qui veut arriver” (145). Though a street prostitute like her sister, and so ostensibly completing the novel’s series of paired major and minor characters (along with the petit-bourgeois Pierre and Louis, and the pimps Bubu and le grand Jules), Blanche stands in conceptually for Bubu in his absence: like the pimp, she is “forte” and “fortifi[e]” Berthe “dans sa voie,” leading her out onto the Sébastopol when she is “déroutée” (142). Whether officially registered or merely impudent (the novel’s reiterated characterization of her as circulating without a hat blurs the terms of the narrator’s classification), Blanche complies with the novel’s reglementarist grid of perception, as her arriviste pursuit accords her a spatial and discursive mobility that Berthe (like Pierre) lacks: “puisque l’argent est une fin en ce monde, elle n’avait ni l’idée du bien ni celle de l’honnêteté et se sentait heureuse comme un homme à son but, du moment qu’elle avait les poches pleines d’argent” (141). Aligning her with the streetwalkers that Octave Uzanne denotes “ces conquérantes de la voie publique,” Philippe portrays Blanche as a female Bubu, a whore who disposes of liberties that Berthe does not possess.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ The ostensible similarity I adduce here is functional rather than essential or temperamental; indeed, as a general practice, Philippe’s novel apportions its dyadic character groups along occupational lines. Thus Pierre and Louis are co-workers at the “compagnie de chemins de fer,” Berthe and Blanche are prostitutes (and their older sister Marthe a wanton *blanchisseuse*); and Bubu and le grand Jules are *souteneurs*. As I have shown, however, the novel simultaneously invites the reader to reroute these evident connections: with respect to their temperamental dispositions and societal *situation*, Louis, Bubu, and Blanche are aligned (as we see in this section), as are (I will show in the next section) Pierre and Berthe.

⁵⁷ Uzanne, *Parisiennes de ce temps*, 391.

It is this clandestine dispossession of the freedoms that would allow her to make her voice readily heard that makes of Berthe's disobedience the point of articulation for the novel's dissensual mapping. Alongside its staging of the Sébastopol's particular temporality – the ambitious diurnal pleasure seekers and resourceful nocturnal debris gleaners we examined at the onset of this chapter – *Bubu's* initial boulevard scene establishes the novel's perceptual cartography, a map that is articulated through the visual dynamics of urban *règlementarisme*: “Le regard des passants regarde, celui des agents surveille” (51). These two gazes correspond roughly to two modes of perception: Pierre's passive apprehension of his surroundings, and Louis's and Bubu's surveillant gaze. There is, however, a third mode of boulevard perception, buried in an oblique reference later in the chapter: “Pierre Hardy s'arrêta. On regarde cela parce qu'il faut regarder quelque chose. Quelques filles publiques aussi, sachant que les rassemblements sont pleins d'excellentes occasions” (64).⁵⁸ While again locating Pierre as one who ineffectually and aimlessly looks on, the narrator more tellingly identifies the whores who gather around the spectacle of the street singers as resourceful poachers, improvisational appropriators of “occasions.” This is the disruptive position of the *fille insoumise*, marginal with respect to both the law of règlementarism and the dominant logic of a text named for a surveillant pimp. Whereas Bubu maps conceptual space in accordance with his proprietary bourgeois ideas – “Là-bas, c'est l'erreur, mais ici, c'est la vérité” – the unregistered and unmapped Berthe has no (proper) place within the pimp's strategic paradigm: with respect to Bubu, the narrator observes, “il n'y avait lieu pour elle d'avoir tort ou d'avoir raison” (78, 143). This threshold between right or reason and wrong, which replicates the clandestine prostitute's liminal legal status

⁵⁸ A roughly commensurate grid is sketched with respect to the behavior of the vehicles on the boulevard: As the text slowly comes to life on the boulevard with descriptions of the “voitures,” “fiacres” and “tramways” whose displacements convey the narrative from day to night, the boulevard is imbued with two modalities of movement and light: the tramways' multidirectional crossings (they “se suivent, se croisent, piétinent et roulent”) and “fanal rouge ou vert” (affixed to the front and back of the car, respectively, and so signaling both comings and goings), and the orderly “courant” of the cars that head toward the Grands Boulevards, with their straightforward “lanternes” (48).

in the age of *tolérance*, also, and relatedly, echoes Certeau's conception of the tactical positioning of the reader:

Ainsi du lecteur : son lieu n'est pas *ici* ou *là*, l'un ou l'autre, mais ni l'un ni l'autre, à la fois dedans et dehors, perdant l'un et l'autre en les mêlant, associant des textes gisants dont il est l'éveilleur et l'hôte, mais jamais le propriétaire. Par là, il esquive aussi la loi de chaque texte en particulier, comme celle du milieu social. [...] Bien loin d'être des écrivains, fondateurs d'un lieu propre, les lecteurs sont des voyageurs; ils circulent sur les terres d'autrui, nomades braconnant à travers les champs qu'ils n'ont pas écrits [...].⁵⁹

It is this inscribed non-place of the clandestine prostitute's practice that eludes the law of both Philippe's novel and of a taxonomic distribution of authority that excludes those of the author's social milieu.

As we might expect given this aesthetic disposition, Berthe persistently troubles the stability of language with the circulation she vehiculates – a characteristic that attenuates the assorted words that seek to tame her and orient her on a given path. When Bubu banks on his lover's cooperation in making him a man of leisure, the text renders her apparent capitulation to his mastery with self-subverting words whose rigid form belies or restricts their semantic plenitude. Thus Berthe's attested malleability – “toutes les femmes sont malléables,” we will remember, according to the constructive logic espoused by Louis and Bubu – is paradoxically the site and source of her tacit resistance to formation: “Berthe, douce et pliante, quand Maurice l'eut prise en main, se plia avec douceur” (74). *Pliante*, Berthe is also *pliant*; her disruptive practice of space and of text is the point of articulation of a textual folding that intervenes in Bubu's order by implicating the reader into *Bubu*. Her surface *compliance* with the pimp's “solid words” is internally subverted by the inscribed present participle, *pliant*, eroding the purview of the descriptors that the narrator (standing in for Bubu) deactivates and affixes to her body in an assertion of her presumed conformity with the will of her pimp. As made manifest by Berthe's dual role as walker and reader – those two figures who, in

⁵⁹ Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien*, 251–252.

Certeau's words, "créé[nt] [...] du discontinu, soit en opérant des tris dans les signifiants de la 'langue' spatiale, soit en les décalant par l'usage qu'il[s] en f[on]t" – the novel's ostensible flatness is thus accorded depth through the subjective interposition of acts of "making do": Berthe's prostitutional interventions on the boulevard Sébastopol (and into the relentlessly horizontal trajectory of Pierre's life), and potentially, the (extradiegetic) reader's incursion into the text, which breaches and adds depth to the novel's planate verbal topography.⁶⁰

That flat verbal landscape is perhaps the novel's most salient stylistic feature, which Leo Spitzer terms "pseudo-objective motivation": an excessive use of "prosaic and commonplace" expressions more typically characteristic of spoken language that imputes "a poetic flavor" to the novel by attributing causality where most observers would "see only coincidence."⁶¹ The unrelenting proliferation of *à cause des* and *puisque* and *parce que* and *cars* that Spitzer shrewdly recognizes as fundamental to Philippe's style paints a Paris actuated by dichotomous divisions, showcasing the interpretative dexterity of a narrator who, like Bubu, is quick to spin a passing impression into a durable locution. I would argue, however, that the narrator's exaggeratedly hypotactic discourse – those proverbial turns of phrase that pass by stiffly like street whores on the Sébastopol, outwardly compliant with the dominant mode of perception – belies the potential of a tactical dissimulation, making manifest the power structure of the reglementarist taxonomy while obscuring the dissonant threads that traverse the narrative grid (51).⁶² These singular turns of phrase, which consistently relegate Pierre to alienation and impotence, chart an inexorably linear narrative map (one that, as we

⁶⁰ Ibid., 149.

⁶¹ Leo Spitzer, *Linguistics and Literary History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1948), 12. For an exhaustive inventory of examples of this pervasive phenomenon (which the scope of this chapter allows me to sketch only briefly here), see Spitzer's earlier article devoted to *Bubu* (Leo Spitzer, "Pseudo-objective Motivation in Charles-Louis Philippe," in *Representative Essays*, ed. Alban K. Forcione, Herbert Lindenberger, and Madeline Sutherland (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford, 1988), 43–81.).

⁶² Spitzer, *Linguistics and Literary History*, 12.

saw earlier, binds poverty to misery much as the Sébastopol unites Paris's banks and Berthe's days and nights) but invite the reader to reroute and divert its connections, to trace an alternative cartography that reconfigures the social and subjective field of *Bubu's* Paris.⁶³ In a deviation from the Zolian model, which would inscribe the reader within the restricted interpretative system of determinism's technocratic cartography (a *mise en carte* articulated through reglementarist metaphor), it is left to the Philippean reader – like the prostitutes who may choose to resist confinement to the grid of registration – to be obedient [*soumis(e)*] or disobedient [*insoumis(e)*] with respect to the narrator's semantic matrix, to comply with the letter of the narrative law or to operate surreptitiously in its margins.

This against-the-grid politics of reading, whereby the reader who would recover the elided nuances of Philippe's text must grapple with the narrator's unwavering propagation of a worldview where things and people are firmly affixed to their discursive place (“un monde où...,” “Paris qui est...”), is made perceptible by the narrator's peripatetic voice. *Bubu's* narrator is nomadic, seamlessly occupying (or co-occupying) the space and voice of an ever-fluctuating and often unascertainable cast of characters through the use of the first person: a reference to Berthe as *elle*, for instance, glides into a “nous qui sommes des femmes sans appui”; a third-person account of Bubu's *flânerie* is disrupted by a second-person address of syphilis (“Es-tu la science du bien, es-tu la science du mal?”) that implies a *je* aligned with the pimp. Like a street whore orchestrating a series of evanescent tricks, the narrator clandestinely merges with the novel's characters, engendering narrative with a subjective promiscuity that adopts the rhythmic cadence of Berthe's liaisons.⁶⁴ With these interpersonal ligations and dissociations, as Jacques Migozzi has justly observed, Philippe “joue

⁶³ On parataxis as a logic of juxtaposition rather than subordination, see Jean-François Lyotard, *Le Différend* (Paris: Minuit, 1984).

⁶⁴ The comparison is most clearly delineated in a peculiar sequence where, during Bubu's imprisonment, Berthe unites with a caricaturesque series of minor *amants de cœur* and *souteneurs*: Blondin-le-Cycliste, l'Aztèque du Grand-Montrouge, La Quille, Kiki, “les gars de Montrouge, ceux de Montparnasse et ceux du Latin” (151-152).

[...] avec la plurivalence du *nous* et du *on* pour, du même mouvement, faire corps avec les exclus, les miséreux et les souffrants.”⁶⁵ The democratic flatness of the narrator’s indiscriminate positioning contravenes the more apparent flatness of the text’s rigorous causalities, mobilizing the rigid aphorisms that deprive both Pierre and Berthe of agency.

The stakes of Berthe’s disobedient engagement are further delineated in a late scene in *Bubu*. When Pierre believes he has won Berthe over, having convinced her to “souffrir” alongside him and thus make of their mutual affliction a shield against the miseries of his urban solitude, the semantic circulation she channels returns to erode the solid(ar)ity of their commiserative dwelling from within and without, revealing Pierre’s substantiating coexistence with Berthe – which seemingly marks the triumph of Louis’s redemptive narrative paradigm – to be an illusory communion with a whore who was never really his, housed in a home that is not one. When Louis joins Pierre and Berthe in a café for a drink, he follows an edifying discourse on the force of “la Bonne Parole” by repeatedly asking Berthe why she continues to practice prostitution (“ce métier”) in Bubu’s absence (161). When she finally responds, after first evading the question by remarking that Louis naively believes “que l’on fait ce que l’on veut,”⁶⁶ Berthe mobilizes the narrative: “Elle partit dans toutes ses histoires de pauvre petite putain trotteuse. Leur imagination fait bien des pas, et c’est bon de marcher comme cela et de réussir dans toutes ses entreprises. Les hommes se disent: On tourne la manivelle et ensuite on les regarde causer” (161-162). While apparently assimilating Pierre under the generic voice of “les hommes,” the narrator’s dismissive turn of phrase is redolent of the patronizing tone of Louis’s “uplifting” speeches; here again, it seems, Pierre’s character “se compose des paroles de [son ami]” (120).

⁶⁵ Migozzi, “Figures et voix du peuple dans *Bubu de Montparnasse* (1901) de Charles-Louis Philippe,” 225.

⁶⁶ One of many phrases that recurs in this novel filled with repetitions and iterations, Berthe’s expression is a rehearsal of an earlier exhortation to Bubu: “Vous vous imaginez que l’on fait comme on veut” (67).

Much as Louis's "malleable" prostitute resists incorporation of the model fictions that would form her as an obedient partner, however, Berthe here evades the place allocated to her by the narrator's condescension. As Berthe recounts her plans for a future as a *café-concert* chanteuse and "entrepreneuse fleuriste," her verbal narrative becomes coextensive in the narratorial imaginary with her ambulatory rhetoric: she mobilizes her tale spatially ("partit"), her imagination takes steps ("fait bien des pas") and walks ("marcher"), her words are seen rather than heard ("on les regarde causer") (162). The plurivalence earlier associated with Berthe's (com)pliant nature recurs here in the infinitive "causer": while watching her speak (and thereby silencing her voice), the narrator also implicitly signals her disruptive force, her ability to "causer" or occasion change. In activating the vehiculating force of metonymy by textually tying the prostitute's verbal practice to her venal practice, Berthe's narrative refuses metaphorization by Pierre and Louis, instead setting the novel's hypotactic words into circulation.⁶⁷ The subjectivating communion that Pierre falteringly founds on the grounds of Berthe's redemption is quickly and progressively eroded by the clandestine tactics activated in this scene: once Louis engages the crank that activates her voice, Berthe keeps talking, indirectly occasioning her return to Bubu by circulating news of her cohabitation with Pierre to her friends.

In light of this analysis of the prostitute's tactical practice of space and of incursionary reading, I want now in closing to revisit our interpretation of *Bubu's* ending. Through the non-transcendent triumph of the pimp's "bourgeois ideas" of property – one that significantly ends with a departure rather than an arrival, and with a descent from Pierre's fifth-floor room rather than an ascent to the panoramic vantage point of the Père Lachaise – Philippe makes perceptible the network of domination and subjection that inheres in a taxonomic mapping intent on keeping

⁶⁷ As Certeau has observed, narrative characteristically and continually "transforme des lieux en espaces ou des espaces en lieux." Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien*, 174.

words, things, and bodies in their proper place – including, here, Pierre, who ends the novel on ground level, crying out impotently much as he does earlier in the novel when faced with the city’s erosive flows. To materialize resistance to Bubu’s authority, however – to combat and contradict the pimp who “n’aim[e] pas les contradicteurs” on his discursive terms – and save Berthe from her master would be to assert his own proprietary dominion over her body, and as Philippe muses about Maria in a letter to Vandeputte, “[il] n’[a] aucun droit sur elle.”⁶⁸ In departing from nineteenth-century narrative conventions by naming his book *Bubu de Montparnasse* (and not, as originally planned, *Berthe Méténier*⁶⁹), Philippe resists standing in for the pimp: sending the book out into the world under Berthe’s name to roam the streets in his stead, available to desirous buyers for the price of a few sous, much as Bubu had initiated his lover into the trade.⁷⁰ By maintaining Berthe’s clandestinity within the covers of the book – and by denying Pierre the heroic agency that would validate the readerly model Louis impels him to heed, resisting a redemptive fictionalization of his own narrative that would endow his literary avatar with the virile mastery and urban authority he lacks – Philippe dissociates and displaces both the urban master’s synoptic gaze (the “regard [qui surveille]”) and the breed of spectatorship the novel codes as Pierre’s passive absorption (the “regard

⁶⁸ “J’ai vu là une scène lamentable. Je n’avais aucun droit sur elle. Je n’étais pas en force. Je pense qu’elle ne protestait pas pour ne pas m’attirer de désagréments. Enfin, après m’avoir juré « sur sa conscience d’homme » qu’il ne lui ferait aucun mal, le bonhomme l’a emmenée. Voilà. Il y a huit jours. Je ne sais plus ce qu’elle est devenue.” Philippe, *Lettres de Jeunesse à Henri Vandeputte*. (January 7, 1899).

⁶⁹ Philippe mentions his indecision with regard to the title in an unpublished letter (dated October 28, 1900) to André Gide: “Je pense l’intituler Bubu de Montparnasse. J’avais choisi d’abord le nom de l’héroïne: Berthe Méténier. Je suis irrésolu et ça m’ennuie parce que c’est important.” Quoted in David Roe, “Charles-Louis Philippe Romancier,” in Pierre Couderc, ed., *Rencontre autour de Charles-Louis Philippe: Actes du Colloque de Clermont-Ferrand (septembre 1991)* (Clermont-Ferrand: Association des Publications de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines de Clermont-Ferrand, 1992), 137.

⁷⁰ Indeed a contemporary commentary on the perils of excessive (and excessively naïve) reading from journalist Gaston Deschamps suggestively likens the books that line the displays of streetside boutiques to street whores:

...vous flânez devant la boutique de Flammarion. Une lumière crue fait flamber les couvertures bleues, jaunes, rouges, violettes, vertes ou zinzolines de bouquins nouveaux. En grosses lettres, les titres s’étalent, prometteurs. Les plus récentes ignominies s’enorgueillissent du chiffre formidable de leurs éditions. C’est la course au gros numéro. Des images colorisées allèchent le passant, le poursuivent d’une obsession tenace, et de tout ce tas de livres semble sortir une cacophonie de supplications câlines et impertinentes : « Prends-moi, monsieur, achète-moi... moi... moi... » [*Le malaise de la démocratie* (Paris: A. Colin, 1899), 112, <http://archive.org/details/lemalaisedelad00desc>].

[qui] regarde”), engaging instead the “mobile and discursive” gaze of the reader to seek out opportunities for intervention.⁷¹ Bereft of both physical and identitary presence, “Pierre” may be not a failed master but rather a protagonistic placeholder, a semi-vacant dwelling available for readerly interposition.

It is precisely the reader’s belated intervention that semantically displaces Louis’s prefabricated interpretation of Pierre’s narrative trajectory. In locating Pierre as both the subject and the object of discourse (“je” and “tu”), *Bubu’s* final passage disjoins the uplifting Buissonian discourse it iterates and obliquely invokes the reader for authorial “support” (*soutenance*): “Si tu étais seul, tu aurais dû descendre en chemise et pieds nus pour crier: Au secours! Tu aurais dû aller dans la rue et raccrocher les passants et leur dire: Accourez tous! Il y a là-bas une femme qu’on assassine” (192). In the absence of a diegetic interlocutor – significantly, Pierre here reframes Louis’s earlier speech by locating himself not as “je” but as “tu” – Pierre’s words are set into circulation, potentially invoking the prostitute and the reader alongside him with an imprecise, indiscriminate second-person pronoun. With a timeless “au secours” that evades the censuring of the past conditional, Philippe’s ending inscribes an opening, a locus for readerly intervention into the text. If Pierre’s passive capitulation to Bubu’s will puts a definitive end to his communion with Berthe, this interpellation of himself and/as the reader effects a rupture, a disincorporative fault line, abrading the paradigm that it ostensibly cements.

A brief anecdote from Philippe’s correspondence with Vandeputte, a self-styled “chapitre inédit” in his affair with Maria attests the novel’s disincorporating force.⁷² Two days after *Bubu’s* 1901 release, we learn, and well after the end of Philippe’s relationship with Maria, the author

⁷¹ I borrow the distinction between the “synoptic” and the “mobile and discursive” gazes from Christian Jacob, *The Sovereign Map: Theoretical Approaches in Cartography Throughout History*, ed. Edward H Dahl, trans. Tom Conley (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 308.

⁷² Philippe, *Lettres De Jeunesse à Henri Vandeputte*, 138 (March 29, 1901).

receives a letter from “la petite que j’ai appelée Berthe,” informing him that she has escaped from Bubu of her own volition and wants to leave Paris to avoid being forced back into prostitution under his watch. “Je me suis occupé d’elle,” Philippe recounts; he puts her on a train to Marseille, where she hopes to return to work as a florist. “Enfin elle est une femme libre,” Philippe writes, “je ne sais pas ce qu’elle fera, mais l’essentiel c’est que Bubu ne la retrouvera pas.”⁷³ *Bubu*, however, does find her, as Philippe reports to Vandeputte: “Elle a acheté mon livre à Marseille. Je ne lui en avais parlé qu’au moment de son départ et je voulais le lui envoyer. Elle l’a acheté ! Elle m’a écrit que c’était bien vrai, tout lui était revenu [...]”⁷⁴ In allowing “Berthe” to circulate freely in text rather than asserting a right to her body that is not properly his, Philippe indirectly occasions her emancipation as a reader, according Maria access to the narrative her body writes by making it common literary property.

Read in this light, Pierre’s inaction at the novel’s close – his failure to comply with the formational literary model so carefully plotted for him by Louis’s didactic discourse, to save “une pauvre Berthe informe et malade” from Bubu – erodes the rigid map of Bubu’s Paris, opening up the “right of the mighty” to the belated intervention of the weak (191). Like Pierre’s rented room, the novel is “malpropre”: an im-proper textual dwelling rentable by readerly tenants for the price of the book and the time of a *passé* through its pages. In splitting Pierre into *pierres*, the words strung together and cemented to the surface of the page like so many stones on the Sébastopol, Philippe furnishes the raw material – a textualization of the stones and cement with which Pierre seeks to rise up out of Paris’s depths – for readerly construction: for Pierre, for the prostitute, and for the disobedient reader. Read as an alternative mapping of prostitution that allows the prostitute to do the mapping, Pierre’s ineffectual muteness in the face of Bubu’s reappropriation of Berthe

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 139.

constitutes a potential rupture, a site for the incursion of a disobedient narrative crafted through Berthe's clandestine practice.⁷⁵ In a final dichotomous turn, Philippe's novel can thus be read in two ways: as *Bubu de Montparnasse*, an obedient fiction of failed mastery; or as *Berthe Méténier*, a mobile and discursive map, a prostitudinal narrative whose disobedience is dissimulated under the threshold of the title's visibility. I do not mean to say that Philippe intends his ending as a rupture; indeed, that Pierre's failure to redeem the prostitute reprises not only Louis's narrative but Philippe's own story suggests a literary rehearsal of that failure, an attempt to master a disobedient narrative (and disobedient prostitute) through its repetition. The two maps of Paris and prostitution I locate in Philippe's novel are not resolvable into a coherent and stable plot; to materialize the prostitute's disobedient map in text would be to efface its potential for disobedience, obliquely registering the *fille insoumise* through a literary *mise en carte*. Rather, I want to suggest that within *Bubu* there lies the possibility of an alternative mapping of prostitution that is not reducible to the taxonomic paradigm of mastery: one where the prostitute does the mapping, tracing with her circulating body and her tactical practice a literary cartography that allows her to locate herself by occupying the margins of text.

⁷⁵ With this furtive disruption of "l'ordre légitime du discours," *Bubu de Montparnasse* diverges from the *arriviste* model of the novel of formation which, as Richard Terdiman has argued, "aimed not to overturn domination but to domesticate or annex the power by which domination functioned." *Discourse/Counter-Discourse*, 87.

Conclusion

The Place and Space of Prostitution

Le vieux Paris n'est plus (la forme d'une ville
Change plus vite, hélas ! que le cœur d'un mortel).
- Charles Baudelaire, "Le Cygne"¹

Brothels, brasseries, boulevards: I have argued that these and other sites comprise a prostitutional map, and that authors in later nineteenth century France appropriate this venal cartography in order to stake out their place on Paris's literary landscape and give textual form to a space-in-process. This mapping is articulated through the lexicon of reglementarist policy, whose polysemic *mise en carte* of the registered prostitute prefigures her inscription within the bounds of a narrative cartography. The official partitioning of whores into *filles soumises* or *inscrites* and *filles insoumises*, *filles de maison* and *filles isolées en carte* – along with the concomitant (and overlapping) classification of clandestine prostitutes as *filles de brasserie* or *verseuses*, *filles de trottoir* or *pierreuses*, *femmes galantes*, *courtisanes*, and the like in the critical and popular imaginary – locates them in space and in text, according them a place by virtue of the modality and space of their practice. It is this spatial and conceptual taxonomy, we have seen, that makes the prostitute a fulcrum for authorial emplacement: for the assertion of mastery over both the prostitute's disruptive mobilization of desire, and the disorienting assemblage of post-Haussmannian Paris's overhauled and ever-changing terrain.

In Huysmans's *Marthe* and Goncourt's *La Fille Élisa*, the prostitute's inscription into the tolerated brothel tames her narratively productive and distinctly urban disorder without extinguishing it, allowing these writers to affirm their authorial mastery by domesticating a modernizing city whose temporal discontinuities and banal spatial unities prove equally unsettling to

¹ *Les Fleurs du Mal* (Paris: Garnier Flammarion, 1991).

naturalist narrative. The then-outmoded *maison de tolérance* serves as a time-traveling splice, allowing for the superposition of an alternative spatiotemporal order onto the capital where both the prostitute and authorial subject are inscribable. While Goncourt nostalgically constructs the tolerated brothel as a protective interior able to stave off the erosive circulation of an excessively exteriorized city, as made manifest by the definitive enclosure of the prostitute's unruly body within a narrative house of detention, Huysmans deploys the reglementarist house as a locus of "tolerance," a site for the coextensive but non-reductive mapping of Paris old and new. To return to the terms set by the pair of Balzacian metaphors with which I opened this dissertation: whereas Goncourt resolves the problem of urban mastery by forcibly conquering the prostitute, a gesture here realizable – unlike in Balzac – only through her death, Huysmans crafts his Paris-as-prostitute from an assemblage of multitemporal flows, an imperfect enclosure that adumbrates a nascent crack in the naturalist's synoptic field of vision.

The clandestine *brasserie à femmes* flourished as the popularity of the tolerated brothel waned, primarily because it satisfied evolving desires by offering clients a story along with their sex. As scores of vulnerable and over-educated fin-de-siècle adolescents like Maurice Barrès's fictional *déracinés* flocked to the beer halls of the Latin Quarter, searching for a plot that would culminate in their standing in for Rastignac at the metaphorical heights of Paris, onlookers decried the propagation of this venal narrative, feared to lead France's young citizens astray. Adolphe Tabarant's *Virus d'amour* demonstrates the authorial force of the *fille de brasserie*'s story, as Alphonsine's prostitutional writing inscribes her clients in a profitable fiction of desire but threatens to divert the naturalist narrative that would contain her. Dispossessed of her place in the brasserie, Alphonsine nonetheless "writes" back, her resonant last words resisting her effacement from the text.

For readers looking back on nineteenth-century fictions of prostitution, Émile Zola looms large, his *Nana* the most memorable (and, in the 1880s and 1890s, influential) iteration of the genre

due in part to the outsized and outrageous personality of the titular courtesan. The courtesan is a point of convergence between Balzac's Paris and Haussmann's: the sentient metaphorical body that incorporates the Balzacian city, and a freely circulating pocket of disorder born of the Second Empire that countervails its urbanistic order from within. Consuming Paris's attention, its architecture, and its citizens with the centripetal force of her sex, the "grande courtisane" is a self-dismantling figure who allows for the mimetic plotting of the imperial capital but clears the terrain for Zola to plot his own city in her wake. Zola encapsulates the cellular fragments she engenders as she "disorganizes" Paris within the walls of Octave Mouret's department store, engaging the delimitative force of the tolerated brothel in metaphor to buttress his mastery of the city. It is however the brasserie model of self-serve narrative protagonism that feeds and sustains the machine, as Zola assembles Paris's women in his regulated house of prostitution.

The representation of the unregistered street prostitute is a different endeavor than that of both the *fille inscrite* and other *insoumises*. Unlike the brothel prostitute or the *fille en carte*, the clandestine streetwalker is unlocalizable; unlike the brasserie whore, she sells no story with her sex. Unlike the courtesan, finally, her conquering – whether articulated through death or redemption – accords no ready-made brand of narrative mastery. Charles-Louis Philippe plots this distinctive flatness in *Bubu de Montparnasse* as the protagonist's failed attempt to put himself on the map by redeeming a *fille de trottoir*, hinging Pierre's subjectivation on an impossible appropriation. The pimp concretizes the paradigm of urban mastery predicated on the subjugation of Paris as prostitute, a *partage du sensible* where (as the narrator muses) "might is always right." Though Philippe maps the capitulation of prostitute and protagonist to the pimp's order, the streetwalker's clandestine disobedience – her tactical practice of space and time – potentially inscribes a fold into the narrative, refusing the closure that would cement her passivity. It is left to the reader to navigate this map: to

take Philippe at his word(s), or to read ironically, poaching a divergent meaning from those words that is not explicitly inscribed.

Though the system of officially tolerated prostitution was formally abolished in France in 1946 by passage of the “loi Marthe Richard,” the past few years have witnessed a resurgent attention to registered Parisian prostitution in French media and popular culture, and particularly to the space of the fin-de-siècle *maison de tolérance*. In closing, I want briefly to trace the contours of this rehearsal of the tropes of reglemented prostitution, and to speculate briefly as to what the nineteenth-century mapping of commercial sex might be able to teach us about negotiating contemporary space (and vice versa).

In 2010, French cable television channel Canal Plus produced and aggressively marketed the first eight episodes of a series entitled *Maison close*, a purportedly “âpre, moderne et réaliste” glimpse into daily life at the *Paradis*, a luxurious Parisian tolerated brothel, in the early 1870s.² The narrative arc of the second season, whose publicity poster represents one of the resident whores as the defiant central figure of Delacroix’s *La Liberté guidant le peuple* (1830), is subsumed under the slogan “Le bordel défie l’ordre,” and indeed the series draws much of its narrative from the brothel’s internal and external resistance to order – and the numerous threats to its existence – at the dawn of the Third Republic. Bertrand Bonello’s feature film *L’Apollonide, Souvenirs de la maison close* (2011) similarly stages a *tolérance* under threat at the turn of the century, one that closes its doors for good as the film comes to an end. Both productions linger within the brothel’s walls, drawing the viewer’s eye to the sumptuous décor and drawing narrative interest from the peculiarities of life as an “inscribed” whore. The attention accorded in both cases to the precariousness of the reglemented brothel’s existence mobilizes the viewer’s desire to see it survive. Reprising the Flaubertian sense that “the best” lies elsewhere, in a brothel from a time gone by, these works embrace a certain “nostalgie pour

² <http://www.canalplus.fr/c-series/c-l-actu-des-series/cid375421-maison-close-lancement-du-site-officiel.html>.

les maisons closes” of nineteenth-century Paris.³ Of course, as we saw in Chapter One, the tolerated brothel was already disappearing at the time evoked in these period pieces, whose depiction of the *maison de tolérance* we might thus consider a doubly nostalgic rehearsal of a past already passed.

Why this nostalgia for reglemented nineteenth-century prostitution, and why now? In different ways, both works impel us to ask these questions. A companion website to *Maison close* welcomes the curious spectator into the brothel, as the proprietress Hortense offers a guided tour of the entry hall and *salon de choix*.⁴ This uncanny inscription into the detailed nineteenth-century *tolérance*, mediated by a distinctly twenty-first-century narrative form, becomes disquieting when the viewer tries to exit the (web)site, as Hortense appears and prohibits us from leaving until debts owed to the house have been paid. With a mouse click resigning us to our fate, the camera cuts sharply to a lecherous customer eager for a *passé*; the viewer is explicitly positioned as prostitute, figured on-screen only by the spread legs connected to an unseen torso and head that – we are led to assume – are our own. This digital narrative virtually maps the present into a past taxonomy, inscribing the modern spectator into its brothel plot.

L'Apollonide figures this dual temporality explicitly, joining contemporary music with period architecture and citational layers of nineteenth-century narrative (from Maupassant's utopian cadre of brothel whores in *La Maison Tellier* to des Esseintes's house of peculiar pleasures in Huysmans's *À Rebours*).⁵ Bonello further compels the spectator to engage in a superposed reading of past and present through an abrupt cut in the film's final scene, where the hermetic darkness of the turn-of-

³ http://www.lepoint.fr/cinema/festival-de-cannes-2011/cannes-2011-nostalgie-des-maisons-closes-16-05-2011-1331190_360.php (Accessed October 10, 2011).

⁴ The site, <http://maisonclose.canalplus.fr>, was taken down at the beginning of the second season, though a video overview is still accessible on the web designer's site at the time of this writing: <http://www.digicase.fr/canalplus/maisonclose/>.

⁵ Bonello himself identifies the reference to Huysmans in an interview with MK2, an independent production company; he also cites Hugo, Baudelaire, Proust, and impressionist painting as influences. <http://www.mk2.com/trois-couleurs/lapollonide-influences>.

the-century brothel yields to the jarring daylight that reveals a downtrodden modern-day prostitute soliciting clients on a busy Parisian street. This juxtaposition reinforces the sense of the *maison close* as a heterotopia by rendering it atemporal, the *Apollonide*'s walls succumbing to the passage of time and evolution of venal desire at the dawn of the twentieth century but retaining the evocative force of their representative authority today. Reading this street scene back through the wistful brothel tableau that immediately precedes it, which stages the *Apollonide*'s final capitulation to financial pressures and changing times, the spectator is reminded of Goncourt's anachronistic grafting of a venal narrative interior onto a Paris perceived as an identitary threat. More openly nostalgic than the producers of *Maison close* for the tolerated "house of pleasures" (the film's American title), Bonello posits reglementarism as a preferable alternative to the nebulous, freeform practices of contemporary prostitution.

Inscribing the viewer into the fin-de-siècle tolerated brothel, these works also register a contentious ongoing debate about the prostitute's place in contemporary France, one whose terms echo the vehement dispute between neoreglementarists and abolitionists at the end of the nineteenth century. Indeed, prostitution in France today is "toujours une affaire de voirie," as sociologist Lilian Mathieu writes, one whose cartographic stakes are made manifest now (as they were then) in the administrative and popular preoccupation with the prostitute's place and the conditions of her visibility.⁶ The 2003 passage of the "loi sur la sécurité intérieure" (known as the "loi Sarkozy," after France's then-Minister of the Interior), which outlawed the "passive solicitation" (*racolage passif*) of clients in the streets of Paris and drove much of the city's prostitutional activity outside the Périphérique, recalls Haussmann's destruction of the brothels in the city's center and concomitant dispersion of "low" prostitution to the city's outskirts in the 1860s. The neoreglementarist reaction to the flourishing of clandestine prostitution during the early Third

⁶ Lilian Mathieu, *La condition prostituée* (Paris: Textuel, 2007), 37.

Republic resurfaced in UMP delegate to the Assemblée Nationale Chantal Brunel's 2010 proposal in favor of bringing back licensed brothels (here refashioned as “maisons ouvertes”).⁷ And in 2012, Minister of Women's Rights Najat Vallaud-Belkacem recommended that prostitution be outlawed altogether, citing the French government's inability to protect prostitutes who are regularly subjected to violence by pimps and organized crime networks – an argument that rehearses criticisms earlier mobilized by fin-de-siècle abolitionists like Yves Guyot and Joséphine Butler.

Arguments deployed in support of all three positions make perceptible the most acute apprehension about prostitution in contemporary France: the “traite des blanches,” a phenomenon that was likewise at the root of fin-de-siècle abolitionism. Though referring to the first decade of the nineteenth century, Alain Corbin's characterization of so-called “white slave trade” as the “carrefour de toutes les obsessions de l'époque” is equally applicable today, as the prostitute's body is once again a locus for the inscription of a wide-ranging body of societal anxieties.⁸ Modern debates about the sex trade are inextricably bound up with more general concerns about the nation and its others, as Mathieu's account of the arrival of the most recent wave of foreign prostitutes in France (primarily from Eastern Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa) as “perçue comme une invasion” or an “intrusion” suggests.⁹ As we saw in our analysis of the *brasserie à femmes* in Chapter Two, this imagery also has its roots in the nineteenth-century prostitutional imaginary: brasserie whores were figured by period observers as “envahisseuses” who rapidly colonized the Latin Quarter, much to the peril of France's vulnerable young men.¹⁰ Goncourt, for his part, would plaintively remark that “[n]ous

⁷ According to a 2010 survey by the CSA institute, 59% of the French population (70% of men and 49% of women) supported the reopening of the *maisons closes*. <http://tempsreel.nouvelobs.com/societe/20100318.OBS0256/59-des-francais-sont-favorables-aux-maisons-closes.html>. Brunel advances her argument for regulation in *Pour en finir avec les violences faites aux femmes* (Paris: Le Cherche Midi, 2010).

⁸ Alain Corbin, *Les Filles de nocce: Misère sexuelle et prostitution au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Flammarion, 2010), 405.

⁹ Mathieu, *La condition prostituée*, 31–32.

¹⁰ Alfred Carel, *Les brasseries à femmes de Paris* (Paris: E. Monnier, 1884), <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k1114210>.

avons vraiment l'air d'une France conquise par le personnel des brasseries et caboulots du quartier latin.”¹¹ These reactions – and associated efforts to reinforce reglementarist policy, thereby colonizing these invasive prostitutes in turn – reflect acute fin-de-siècle anxieties about the health and virility of a nation then threatened by foreign defeat and domestic unrest. The return of these tropes in contemporary discourse bespeaks a fantasmatic conflation of prostitution and immigration; current debates about prostitution and the recent polemic surrounding the place of Romani immigrants in France, for instance, engage a shared paradigm of mapping, whereby the spatial and linguistic circumscription of the other is perceived as necessary to the consolidation and stability of the self.

In light of this common taxonomy, the retrospective embrace of fin-de-siècle reglementarism in popular and political culture would seem to betray a more pervasive desire for fixity and location, in a global Paris that (like its Second Empire counterpart) is constantly and rapidly evolving. While this project has focused on the representation of prostitution, and particularly the narrative mobilization of venal space in the service of authorial mastery, I want to acknowledge here the evident disjuncture between the mimetic mapping of commercial sex and the embodied “mastery” of the prostitute’s body – a gap that is particularly visible in the case of the “traite des blanches.” I would suggest, however, that the mapping of the prostitute’s body to space and to text is not ineluctably objectifying, and indeed that it can carry the potential for subjectivation by virtue of putting her “on the map” (a possibility to which I gestured in my analysis of *Bubu de Montparnasse*). This equivocal mapping subtends Abdellatif Kechiche’s 2010 film *Vénus noire*, where the humiliating depiction of so-called “Hottentot Venus” Saartjie Baartman’s time spent in a Parisian tolerated brothel in the 1810s – and of her subsequent stint turning tricks in the streets after a failed hygienic check leads to her expulsion from the bordello – simultaneously engages the spectator’s

¹¹ Edmond de Goncourt, *Journal*, vol. 3 (1879–1890) (Paris: Flammarion, 1959), 128.

gaze in a complicit objectification of the protagonist's exoticized form and redirects that gaze back onto the viewing subject. Excavating Baartman's disquieting story from the archives of France's history, Kechiche renders her body at once a landmark and a mirror, re-presenting a buried narrative that earlier resurfaced in the long-contested repatriation of Baartman's remains to South Africa in 2002, and inscribing within that plot a meditation on the role of othering in the construction of contemporary space. The devotion of a significant portion of the episode in France to Baartman's work as a registered prostitute brings to light the ambivalent nature of the *mise en carte*, as the spectator's attention to Baartman's neglected biography is forcibly assimilated to a voyeuristic attention to her sexualized body. If Kechiche looks back to an inscribed nineteenth-century prostitute in order to locate the present, however, it is not here (as we saw with respect to Goncourt in *La Fille Élisa*) in order to assert mastery over his space and time, but rather to reveal the conditions and mechanisms of that mastery – not to map the self by situating the prostitute as other, but to map the self *as* other, thereby according those others a place. Here still, it seems, prostitution remains (to paraphrase Flaubert) a myth, and the prostitute's body remains a foundational substance for the stories we spin to make sense of our space, our time, and ourselves.

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